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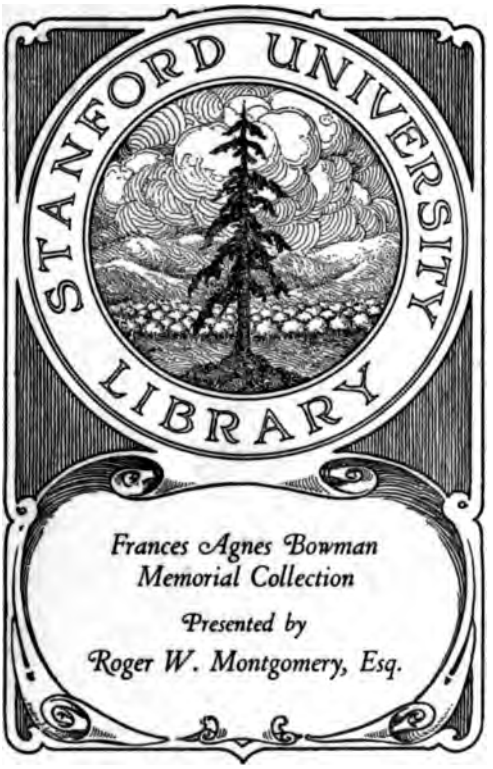
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CHAMPLAIN EDITION.

VOL. XIX.

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No. 319

[redacted]

THE

OREGON TRAIL:

SKETCHES

OF

PRAIRIE AND ROCKY-MOUNTAIN LIFE.

BY

FRANCIS PARKMAN.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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TO

THE COMRADE OF A SUMMER

AND

THE FRIEND OF A LIFETIME,

QUINCY ADAMS SHAW.

THE "Oregon Trail" is the title under which this book first appeared. It was afterwards changed by the publisher, and is now restored to the form in which it originally stood in the Knickerbocker Magazine. As the early editions were printed in my absence, I did not correct the proofs, — a process doubly necessary, since the book was written from dictation. The necessary corrections have been made in the present edition.

PREFACE

TO THE EDITION OF 1892.

In the preface to the fourth edition of this book, printed in 1872, I spoke of the changes that had already come over the Far West. Since that time change has grown to metamorphosis. For Indian teepees, with their trophies of bow, lance, shield, and dangling scalp-locks, we have towns and cities, resorts of health and pleasure seekers, with an agreeable society, Paris fashions, the magazines, the latest poem, and the last new novel. The sons of civilization, drawn by the fascinations of a fresher and bolder life, thronged to the western wilds in multitudes which blighted the charm that had lured them.

The buffalo is gone, and of all his millions nothing is left but bones. Tame cattle and fences of barbed wire have supplanted his vast herds and boundless grazing grounds. Those discordant serenaders, the wolves that howled at

evening about the traveller's camp-fire, have succumbed to arsenic and hushed their savage music. The wild Indian is turned into an ugly caricature of his conqueror; and that which made him romantic, terrible, and hateful, is in large measure scourged out of him. The slow cavalcade of horsemen armed to the teeth has disappeared before parlor cars and the effeminate comforts of modern travel.

The rattlesnakes have grown bashful and retiring. The mountain lion shrinks from the face of man, and even grim "Old Ephraim,"[1] the grizzly bear, seeks the seclusion of his dens and caverns. It is said that he is no longer his former self, having found, by an intelligence not hitherto set to his credit, that his ferocious strength is no match for a repeating rifle; with which discovery he is reported to have grown diffident, and abated the truculence of his more prosperous days. One may be permitted to doubt if the bloodthirsty old savage has really experienced a change of heart; and before inviting him to single combat, the ambitious tenderfoot, though the proud possessor of a Winchester with sixteen cartridges in the magazine, would

[1] Alias "Old Caleb" and "Old Enoch."

do well to consider not only the quality of his weapon, but also that of his own nerves.

He who feared neither bear, Indian, nor devil, the all-daring and all-enduring trapper, belongs to the past, or lives only in a few gray-bearded survivals. In his stead we have the cowboy, and even his star begins to wane.

The Wild West is tamed, and its savage charms have withered. If this book can help to keep their memory alive, it will have done its part. It has found a powerful helper in the pencil of Mr. Remington, whose pictures are as full of truth as of spirit, for they are the work of one who knew the prairies and the mountains before irresistible commonplace had subdued them.

BOSTON, 16 September, 1892.

PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION.

THE following sketches first appeared in 1847. A summer's adventures of two youths just out of college might well enough be allowed to fall into oblivion, were it not that a certain interest will always attach to the record of that which has passed away never to return. This book is the reflection of forms and conditions of life which have ceased, in great measure, to exist. It mirrors the image of an irrevocable past.

I remember that, as we rode by the foot of Pike's Peak, when for a fortnight we met no face of man, my companion remarked, in a tone anything but complacent, that a time would come when those plains would be a grazing country, the buffalo give place to tame cattle, farmhouses be scattered along the water-courses, and wolves, bears, and Indians be numbered among the things that were. We condoled with each other on so melancholy a prospect, but we little thought what the future had in store. We

knew that there was more or less gold in the seams of those untrodden mountains; but we did not foresee that it would build cities in the waste and plant hotels and gambling-houses among the haunts of the grizzly bear. We knew that a few fanatical outcasts were groping their way across the plains to seek an asylum from Gentile persecution; but we did not imagine that the polygamous hordes of Mormon would rear a swarming Jerusalem in the bosom of solitude itself. We knew that, more and more, year after year, the trains of emigrant wagons would creep in slow procession towards barbarous Oregon or wild and distant California; but we did not dream how Commerce and Gold would breed nations along the Pacific, the disenchanting screech of the locomotive break the spell of weird mysterious mountains, woman's rights invade the fastnesses of the Arapahoes, and despairing savagery, assailed in front and rear, vail its scalp-locks and feathers before triumphant commonplace. We were no prophets to foresee all this; and, had we foreseen it, perhaps some perverse regrets might have tempered the ardor of our rejoicing.

The wild cavalcade that defiled with me down the gorges of the Black Hills, with its paint and

war-plumes, fluttering trophies and savage embroidery, bows, arrows, lances, and shields, will never be seen again. Those who formed it have found bloody graves, or a ghastlier burial in the maws of wolves. The Indian of to-day, armed with a revolver and crowned with an old hat; cased, possibly, in trousers or muffled in a tawdry shirt, — is an Indian still, but an Indian shorn of the picturesqueness which was his most conspicuous merit.

The mountain trapper is no more, and the grim romance of his wild, hard life is a memory of the past.

As regards the motives which sent us to the mountains, our liking for them would have sufficed; but, in my case, another incentive was added. I went in great measure as a student, to prepare for a literary undertaking of which the plan was already formed, but which, from the force of inexorable circumstances, is still but half accomplished. It was this that prompted some proceedings on my part, which, without a fixed purpose in view, might be charged with youthful rashness. My business was observation, and I was willing to pay dearly for the opportunity of exercising it.

Two or three years ago, I made a visit to our

guide, the brave and true-hearted Henry Chatillon, at the town of Carondelet, near St. Louis. It was more than twenty years since we had met. Time hung heavy on his hands, as usual with old mountain-men married and established; his hair was touched with gray, and his face and figure showed tokens of early hardship; but the manly simplicity of his character was unchanged. He told me that the Indians with whom I had been domesticated, a band of the hated Sioux, had nearly all been killed in fights with the white men.

The faithful Deslauriers is, I believe, still living on the frontier of Missouri. The hunter Raymond perished in the snow during Fremont's disastrous passage of the mountains in the winter of 1848.

BOSTON, March 30, 1872.

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THE OREGON TRAIL.

THE OREGON TRAIL.

CHAPTER I.

THE FRONTIER.

LAST spring, 1846, was a busy season in the city of St. Louis. Not only were emigrants from every part of the country preparing for the journey to Oregon and California, but an unusual number of traders were making ready their wagons and outfits for Santa Fé. The hotels were crowded, and the gunsmiths and saddlers were kept constantly at work in providing arms and equipments for the different parties of travellers. Steamboats were leaving the levee and passing up the Missouri, crowded with passengers on their way to the frontier.

In one of these, the "Radnor," since snagged and lost, my friend and relative, Quincy Adams Shaw, and myself, left St. Louis on the twenty-eighth of April, on a tour of curiosity and amusement to the Rocky Mountains. The boat was loaded until the water broke alternately over her guards. Her upper-deck was covered with large wagons of a peculiar form, for the Santa Fé trade, and her hold was

crammed with goods for the same destination. There were also the equipments and provisions of a party of Oregon emigrants, a band of mules and horses, piles of saddles and harness, and a multitude of nondescript articles, indispensable on the prairies. Almost hidden in this medley was a small French cart, of the sort very appropriately called a "mule-killer," beyond the frontiers, and not far distant a tent, together with a miscellaneous assortment of boxes and barrels. The whole equipage was far from prepossessing in its appearance; yet, such as it was, it was destined to a long and arduous journey on which the persevering reader will accompany it.

The passengers on board the "Radnor" corresponded with her freight. In her cabin were Santa Fé traders, gamblers, speculators, and adventurers of various descriptions, and her steerage was crowded with Oregon emigrants, "mountain men," negroes, and a party of Kanzas Indians, who had been on a visit to St. Louis.

Thus laden, the boat struggled upward for seven or eight days against the rapid current of the Missouri, grating upon snags, and hanging for two or three hours at a time upon sand-bars. We entered the mouth of the Missouri in a drizzling rain, but the weather soon became clear, and showed distinctly the broad and turbid river, with its eddies, its sand-bars, its ragged islands and forest-covered shores. The Missouri is constantly changing its course, wearing away its banks on one side, while it forms new

ones on the other. Its channel is continually shifting. Islands are formed, and then washed away, and while the old forests on one side are undermined and swept off, a young growth springs up from the new soil upon the other. With all these changes, the water is so charged with mud and sand that, in spring, it is perfectly opaque, and in a few minutes deposits a sediment an inch thick in the bottom of a tumbler. The river was now high; but when we descended in the autumn it was fallen very low, and all the secrets of its treacherous shallows were exposed to view. It was frightful to see the dead and broken trees, thick-set as a military abattis, firmly imbedded in the sand, and all pointing down stream, ready to impale any unhappy steamboat that at high water should pass over them.

In five or six days we began to see signs of the great western movement that was taking place. Parties of emigrants, with their tents and wagons, were encamped on open spots near the bank, on their way to the common rendezvous at Independence. On a rainy day, near sunset, we reached the landing of this place, which is some miles from the river, on the extreme frontier of Missouri. The scene was characteristic, for here were represented at one view the most remarkable features of this wild and enterprising region. On the muddy shore stood some thirty or forty dark slavish-looking Spaniards, gazing stupidly out from beneath their broad hats. They were attached to one of the Santa Fé companies,

whose wagons were crowded together on the banks above. In the midst of these, crouching over a smouldering fire, was a group of Indians, belonging to a remote Mexican tribe. One or two French hunters from the mountains, with their long hair and buckskin dresses, were looking at the boat; and seated on a log close at hand were three men, with rifles lying across their knees. The foremost of these, a tall, strong figure, with a clear blue eye and an open, intelligent face, might very well represent that race of restless and intrepid pioneers whose axes and rifles have opened a path from the Alleghanies to the western prairies. He was on his way to Oregon, probably a more congenial field to him than any that now remained on this side of the great plains.

Early on the next morning we reached Kanzas, about five hundred miles from the mouth of the Missouri. Here we landed, and leaving our equipments in charge of Colonel Chick, whose log-house was the substitute for a tavern, we set out in a wagon for Westport, where we hoped to procure mules and horses for the journey.

It was a remarkably fresh and beautiful May morning. The woods, through which the miserable road conducted us, were lighted by the bright sunshine and enlivened by a multitude of birds. We overtook on the way our late fellow-travellers, the Kanzas Indians, who, adorned with all their finery, were proceeding homeward at a round pace; and whatever

they might have seemed on board the boat, they made a very striking and picturesque feature in the forest landscape.

Westport was full of Indians, whose little shaggy ponies were tied by dozens along the houses and fences. Sacs and Foxes, with shaved heads and painted faces, Shawanoes and Delawares, fluttering in calico frocks and turbans, Wyandots dressed like white men, and a few wretched Kanzas wrapped in old blankets, were strolling about the streets, or lounging in and out of the shops and houses.

As I stood at the door of the tavern, I saw a remarkable-looking personage coming up the street. He had a ruddy face, garnished with the stumps of a bristly red beard and moustache; on one side of his head was a round cap with a knob at the top, such as Scottish laborers sometimes wear; his coat was of a nondescript form, and made of a gray Scotch plaid, with the fringes hanging all about it; he wore trousers of coarse homespun, and hob-nailed shoes; and to complete his equipment, a little black pipe was stuck in one corner of his mouth. In this curious attire, I recognized Captain C——, of the British army, who, with his brother, and Mr. R——, an English gentleman, was bound on a hunting expedition across the continent. I had seen the captain and his companions at St. Louis. They had now been for some time at Westport, making preparations for their departure, and waiting for a reinforcement, since they were too few in number to attempt it alone. They might, it

is true, have joined some of the parties of emigrants who were on the point of setting out for Oregon and California; but they professed great disinclination to have any connection with the "Kentucky fellows."

The captain now urged it upon us that we should join forces and proceed to the mountains in company. Feeling no greater partiality for the society of the emigrants than they did, we thought the arrangement a good one, and consented to it. Our future fellow-travellers had installed themselves in a little log-house, where we found them surrounded by saddles, harness, guns, pistols, telescopes, knives, and, in short, their complete appointments for the prairie. R——, who had a taste for natural history, sat at a table stuffing a woodpecker; the brother of the captain, who was an Irishman, was splicing a trail-rope on the floor. The captain pointed out, with much complacency, the different articles of their outfit. "You see," said he, "that we are all old travellers. I am convinced that no party ever went upon the prairie better provided." The hunter whom they had employed, a surly-looking Canadian, named Sorel, and their muleteer, an American ruffian from St. Louis, were lounging about the building. In a little log stable close at hand were their horses and mules, selected with excellent judgment by the captain.

We left them to complete their arrangements, while we pushed our own to all convenient speed. The emigrants, for whom our friends professed such con-

tempt, were encamped on the prairie about eight or ten miles distant, to the number of a thousand or more, and new parties were constantly passing out from Independence to join them. They were in great confusion, holding meetings, passing resolutions, and drawing up regulations, but unable to unite in the choice of leaders to conduct them across the prairie. Being at leisure one day, I rode over to Independence. The town was crowded. A multitude of shops had sprung up to furnish the emigrants and Santa Fé traders with necessaries for their journey; and there was an incessant hammering and banging from a dozen blacksmiths' sheds, where the heavy wagons were being repaired, and the horses and oxen shod. The streets were thronged with men, horses, and mules. While I was in the town, a train of emigrant wagons from Illinois passed through, to join the camp on the prairie, and stopped in the principal street. A multitude of healthy children's faces were peeping out from under the covers of the wagons. Here and there a buxom damsel was seated on horseback, holding over her sunburnt face an old umbrella or a parasol, once gaudy enough, but now miserably faded. The men, very sober-looking countrymen, stood about their oxen; and as I passed I noticed three old fellows, who, with their long whips in their hands, were zealously discussing the doctrine of regeneration. The emigrants, however, are not all of this stamp. Among them are some of the vilest outcasts in the country. I have often per-

plexed myself to divine the various motives that give impulse to this migration; but whatever they may be, whether an insane hope of a better condition in life, or a desire of shaking off restraints of law and society, or mere restlessness, certain it is, that multitudes bitterly repent the journey, and, after they have reached the land of promise, are happy enough to escape from it.

In the course of seven or eight days we had brought our preparations nearly to a close. Meanwhile our friends had completed theirs, and, becoming tired of Westport, they told us that they would set out in advance, and wait at the crossing of the Kanzas till we should come up. Accordingly R—— and the muleteer went forward with the wagon and tent, while the captain and his brother, together with Sorel, and a trapper named Boisverd, who had joined them, followed with the band of horses. The commencement of the journey was ominous, for the captain was scarcely a mile from Westport, riding along in state at the head of his party, leading his intended buffalo horse by a rope, when a tremendous thunder-storm came on and drenched them all to the skin. They hurried on to reach the place, about seven miles off, where R—— was to have had the camp in readiness to receive them. But this prudent person, when he saw the storm approaching, had selected a sheltered glade in the woods where he pitched his tent, and was sipping a comfortable cup of coffee while the captain galloped for miles beyond

through the rain to look for him. At length the storm cleared away, and the sharp-eyed trapper succeeded in discovering his tent; R—— had by this time finished his coffee, and was seated on a buffalo-robe smoking his pipe. The captain was one of the most easy-tempered men in existence, so he bore his ill-luck with great composure, shared the dregs of the coffee with his brother, and lay down to sleep in his wet clothes.

We ourselves had our share of the deluge. We were leading a pair of mules to Kanzas when the storm broke. Such sharp and incessant flashes of lightning, such stunning and continuous thunder, I had never known before. The woods were completely obscured by the diagonal sheets of rain that fell with a heavy roar, and rose in spray from the ground, and the streams swelled so rapidly that we could hardly ford them. At length, looming through the rain, we saw the log-house of Colonel Chick, who received us with his usual bland hospitality; while his wife, who, though a little soured and stiffened by a long course of camp-meetings, was not behind him in goodwill, supplied us with the means of bettering our drenched and bedraggled condition. The storm clearing away at about sunset opened a noble prospect from the porch of the colonel's house, which stands upon a high hill. The sun streamed from the breaking clouds upon the swift and angry Missouri, and on the vast expanse of forest that stretched from its banks back to the distant bluffs.

Returning on the next day to Westport, we received a message from the captain, who had ridden back to deliver it in person, but finding that we were in Kanzas, had intrusted it with an acquaintance of his named Vogel, who kept a small grocery and liquor shop. Whiskey, by the way, circulates more freely in Westport than is altogether safe in a place where every man carries a loaded pistol in his pocket. As we passed this establishment we saw Vogel's broad German face thrust from his door. He said he had something to tell us, and invited us to take a dram. Neither his liquor nor his message was very palatable. The captain had returned to give us notice that R——, who assumed the direction of his party, had determined upon another route from that agreed upon between us; and instead of taking the course of the traders, had resolved to pass northward by Fort Leavenworth, and follow the path marked out by the dragoons in their expedition of last summer. To adopt such a plan without consulting us, we looked upon as a high-handed proceeding; but suppressing our dissatisfaction as well as we could, we made up our minds to join them at Fort Leavenworth, where they were to wait for us.

Accordingly, our preparation being now complete, we attempted one fine morning to begin our journey. The first step was an unfortunate one. No sooner were our animals put in harness than the shaft-mule reared and plunged, burst ropes and straps, and nearly flung the cart into the Missouri. Finding

her wholly uncontrollable, we exchanged her for another, with which we were furnished by our friend Mr. Boone, of Westport, a grandson of Daniel Boone, the pioneer. This foretaste of prairie experience was very soon followed by another. Westport was scarcely out of sight when we encountered a deep muddy gully, of a species that afterward became but too familiar to us, and here for the space of an hour or more the cart stuck fast.

CHAPTER II.

BREAKING THE ICE.

EMERGING from the mud-holes of Westport, we pursued our way for some time along the narrow track, in the checkered sunshine and shadow of the woods, till at length, issuing into the broad light, we left behind us the farthest outskirts of the great forest, that once spread from the western plains to the shore of the Atlantic. Looking over an intervening belt of bushes, we saw the green, ocean-like expanse of prairie, stretching swell beyond swell to the horizon.

It was a mild, calm spring day; a day when one is more disposed to musing and revery than to action, and the softest part of his nature is apt to gain the upper hand. I rode in advance of the party, as we passed through the bushes, and, as a nook of green grass offered a strong temptation, I dismounted and lay down there. All the trees and saplings were in flower, or budding into fresh leaf; the red clusters of the maple-blossoms and the rich flowers of the Indian apple were there in profusion; and I was half inclined to regret leaving behind the land of gardens for the rude and stern scenes of the prairie and the mountains.

Meanwhile the party came in sight out of the bushes. Foremost rode Henry Chatillon, our guide and hunter, a fine athletic figure, mounted on a hardy gray Wyandot pony. He wore a white blanket-coat, a broad hat of felt, moccasons, and trousers of deer-skin, ornamented along the seams with rows of long fringes. His knife was stuck in his belt; his bullet-pouch and powder-horn hung at his side, and his rifle lay before him, resting against the high pommel of his saddle, which, like all his equipments, had seen hard service, and was much the worse for wear. Shaw followed close, mounted on a little sorrel horse, and leading a larger animal by a rope. His outfit, which resembled mine, had been provided with a view to use rather than ornament. It consisted of a plain, black Spanish saddle, with holsters of heavy pistols, a blanket rolled up behind, and the trail-rope attached to his horse's neck hanging coiled in front. He carried a double-barrelled smooth-bore, while I had a rifle of some fifteen pounds' weight. At that time our attire, though far from elegant, bore some marks of civilization, and offered a very favorable contrast to the inimitable shabbiness of our appearance on the return journey. A red flannel shirt, belted around the waist like a frock, then constituted our upper garment; moccasons had supplanted our failing boots; and the remaining essential portion of our attire consisted of an extraordinary article, manufactured by a squaw out of smoked buckskin. Our muleteer, Deslauriers, brought

up the rear with his cart, wading ankle-deep in the mud, alternately puffing at his pipe, and ejaculating in his prairie patois, "*Sacré enfant de garce!*" as one of the mules would seem to recoil before some abyss of unusual profundity. The cart was of the kind that one may see by scores around the market-place at Quebec, and had a white covering to protect the articles within. These were our provisions and a tent, with ammunition, blankets, and presents for the Indians.

We were in all four men with eight animals; for besides the spare horses led by Shaw and myself, an additional mule was driven along with us as a reserve in case of accident.

After this summing up of our forces, it may not be amiss to glance at the characters of the two men who accompanied us.

Deslauriers was a Canadian, with all the characteristics of the true Jean Baptiste. Neither fatigue, exposure, nor hard labor could ever impair his cheerfulness and gayety, or his politeness to his *bourgeois;* and when night came, he would sit down by the fire, smoke his pipe, and tell stories with the utmost contentment. The prairie was his element. Henry Chatillon was of a different stamp. When we were at St. Louis, several gentlemen of the Fur Company had kindly offered to procure for us a hunter and guide suited for our purposes, and on coming one afternoon to the office, we found there a tall and exceedingly well-dressed man, with a face so open

and frank that it attracted our notice at once. We were surprised at being told that it was he who wished to guide us to the mountains. He was born in a little French town near St. Louis, and from the age of fifteen years had been constantly in the neighborhood of the Rocky Mountains, employed for the most part by the company, to supply their forts with buffalo meat. As a hunter, he had but one rival in the whole region, a man named Simoneau, with whom, to the honor of both of them, he was on terms of the closest friendship. He had arrived at St. Louis the day before, from the mountains, where he had been for four years; and he now asked only to go and spend a day with his mother, before setting out on another expedition. His age was about thirty; he was six feet high, and very powerfully and gracefully moulded. The prairies had been his school; he could neither read nor write, but he had a natural refinement and delicacy of mind, such as is rare even in women. His manly face was a mirror of uprightness, simplicity, and kindness of heart; he had, moreover, a keen perception of character, and a tact that would preserve him from flagrant error in any society. Henry had not the restless energy of an Anglo-American. He was content to take things as he found them; and his chief fault arose from an excess of easy generosity, not conducive to thriving in the world. Yet it was commonly remarked of him, that whatever he might choose to do with what belonged to himself, the property of others was always

safe in his hands. His bravery was as much celebrated in the mountains as his skill in hunting; but it is characteristic of him that in a country where the rifle is the chief arbiter between man and man, he was very seldom involved in quarrels. Once or twice, indeed, his quiet good-nature had been mistaken and presumed upon, but the consequences of the error were such that no one was ever known to repeat it. No better evidence of the intrepidity of his temper could be asked, than the common report that he had killed more than thirty grizzly bears. He was a proof of what unaided nature will sometimes do. I have never, in the city or in the wilderness, met a better man than my true-hearted friend, Henry Chatillon.

We were soon free of the woods and bushes, and fairly upon the broad prairie. Now and then a Shawanoe passed us, riding his little shaggy pony at a "lope;" his calico shirt, his gaudy sash, and the gay handkerchief bound around his snaky hair, fluttering in the wind. At noon we stopped to rest not far from a little creek, replete with frogs and young turtles. There had been an Indian encampment at the place, and the framework of the lodges still remained, enabling us very easily to gain a shelter from the sun, by merely spreading one or two blankets over them. Thus shaded, we sat upon our saddles, and Shaw for the first time lighted his favorite Indian pipe; while Deslauriers was squatted over a hot bed of coals, shading his eyes with one hand,

and holding a little stick in the other, with which he regulated the hissing contents of the frying-pan. The horses were turned to feed among the scattered bushes of a low oozy meadow. A drowsy spring-like sultriness pervaded the air, and the voices of ten thousand young frogs and insects, just awakened into life, rose in varied chorus from the creek and the meadows.

Scarcely were we seated when a visitor approached. This was an old Kanzas Indian; a man of distinction, if one might judge from his dress. His head was shaved and painted red, and from the tuft of hair remaining on the crown dangled several eagle's feathers, and the tails of two or three rattlesnakes. His cheeks, too, were daubed with vermilion; his ears were adorned with green glass pendants; a collar of grizzly bears' claws surrounded his neck, and several large necklaces of wampum hung on his breast. Having shaken us by the hand with a grunt of salutation, the old man, dropping his red blanket from his shoulders, sat down cross-legged on the ground. We offered him a cup of sweetened water, at which he ejaculated "Good!" and was beginning to tell us how great a man he was, and how many Pawnees he had killed, when suddenly a motley concourse appeared wading across the creek towards us. They filed past in rapid succession, men, women, and children: some were on horseback, some on foot, but all were alike squalid and wretched. Old squaws, mounted astride of shaggy, meagre little ponies, with

perhaps one or two snake-eyed children seated behind them, clinging to their tattered blankets; tall lank young men on foot, with bows and arrows in their hands; and girls whose native ugliness not all the charms of glass beads and scarlet cloth could disguise, made up the procession; although here and there was a man who, like our visitor, seemed to hold some rank in this respectable community. They were the dregs of the Kanzas nation, who, while their betters were gone to hunt the buffalo, had left the village on a begging expedition to Westport.

When this ragamuffin horde had passed, we caught our horses, saddled, harnessed, and resumed our journey. Fording the creek, the low roofs of a number of rude buildings appeared, rising from a cluster of groves and woods on the left; and riding up through a long lane amid a profusion of wild roses and early spring flowers, we found the log-church and schoolhouses belonging to the Methodist Shawanoe Mission. The Indians were on the point of gathering to a religious meeting. Some scores of them, tall men in half-civilized dress, were seated on wooden benches under the trees; while their horses were tied to the sheds and fences. Their chief, Parks, a remarkably large and athletic man, had just arrived from Westport, where he owns a trading establishment. Beside this, he has a large farm and a considerable number of slaves. Indeed, the Shawanoes have made greater progress in agriculture than any other tribe on the Missouri frontier, and both in

appearance and in character form a marked contrast to our late acquaintance, the Kanzas.

A few hours' ride brought us to the banks of the river Kanzas. Traversing the woods that lined it, and ploughing through the deep sand, we encamped not far from the bank, at the Lower Delaware crossing. Our tent was erected for the first time, on a meadow close to the woods, and the camp preparations being complete, we began to think of supper. An old Delaware woman, of some three hundred pounds' weight, sat in the porch of a little log-house, close to the water, and a very pretty half-breed girl was engaged, under her superintendence, in feeding a large flock of turkeys that were fluttering and gobbling about the door. But no offers of money, or even of tobacco, could induce her to part with one of her favorites: so I took my rifle, to see if the woods or the river could furnish us anything. A multitude of quails were plaintively whistling in the meadows; but nothing appropriate to the rifle was to be seen, except three buzzards, seated on the spectral limbs of an old dead sycamore, that thrust itself out over the river from the dense sunny wall of fresh foliage. Their ugly heads were drawn down between their shoulders, and they seemed to luxuriate in the soft sunshine that was pouring from the west. As they offered no epicurean temptations, I refrained from disturbing their enjoyment; but contented myself with admiring the calm beauty of the sunset, — for the river, eddying swiftly in deep purple shadows

between the impending woods, formed a wild but tranquillizing scene.

When I returned to the camp, I found Shaw and an old Indian seated on the ground in close conference, passing the pipe between them. The old man was explaining that he loved the whites, and had an especial partiality for tobacco. Deslauriers was arranging upon the ground our service of tin cups and plates; and as other viands were not to be had, he set before us a repast of biscuit and bacon, and a large pot of coffee. Unsheathing our knives, we attacked it, disposed of the greater part, and tossed the residue to the Indian. Meanwhile our horses, now hobbled for the first time, stood among the trees, with their fore-legs tied together, in great disgust and astonishment. They seemed by no means to relish this foretaste of what awaited them. Mine, in particular, had conceived a mortal aversion to the prairie life. One of them, christened Hendrick, an animal whose strength and hardihood were his only merits, and who yielded to nothing but the cogent arguments of the whip, looked toward us with an indignant countenance, as if he meditated avenging his wrongs with a kick. The other, Pontiac, a good horse, though of plebeian lineage, stood with his head drooping and his mane hanging about his eyes, with the grieved and sulky air of a lubberly boy sent off to school. His forebodings were but too just; for when I last heard from him, he was under the lash of an Ogillallah brave, on a war-party against the Crows.

As it grew dark and the voices of the whippoorwills succeeded the whistle of the quails, we removed our saddles to the tent to serve as pillows, spread our blankets upon the ground, and prepared to bivouac for the first time that season. Each man selected the place in the tent which he was to occupy for the journey. To Deslauriers, however, was assigned the cart into which he could creep in wet weather, and find a much better shelter than his *bourgeois* enjoyed in the tent.

The river Kanzas at this point forms the boundary-line between the country of the Shawanoes and that of the Delawares. We crossed it on the following day, rafting over our horses and equipments with much difficulty, and unlading our cart in order to make our way up the steep ascent on the farther bank. It was a Sunday morning; warm, tranquil, and bright; and a perfect stillness reigned over the rough enclosures and neglected fields of the Delawares, except the ceaseless hum and chirruping of myriads of insects. Now and then an Indian rode past on his way to the meeting-house, or, through the dilapidated entrance of some shattered log-house, an old woman might be discerned enjoying all the luxury of idleness. There was no village bell, for the Delawares have none; and yet upon that forlorn and rude settlement was the same spirit of Sabbath repose and tranquillity as in some New England village among the mountains of New Hampshire, or the Vermont woods.

A military road led from this point to Fort Leavenworth, and for many miles the farms and cabins of the Delawares were scattered at short intervals on either hand. The little rude structures of logs erected usually on the borders of a tract of woods made a picturesque feature in the landscape. But the scenery needed no foreign aid. Nature had done enough for it; and the alternation of rich green prairies and groves that stood in clusters, or lined the banks of the numerous little streams, had all the softened and polished beauty of a region that has been for centuries under the hand of man. At that early season, too, it was in the height of its freshness. The woods were flushed with the red buds of the maple; there were frequent flowering shrubs unknown in the east; and the green swells of the prairie were thickly studded with blossoms.

Encamping near a spring, by the side of a hill, we resumed our journey in the morning, and early in the afternoon were within a few miles of Fort Leavenworth. The road crossed a stream densely bordered with trees, and running in the bottom of a deep woody hollow. We were about to descend into it when a wild and confused procession appeared, passing through the water below, and coming up the steep ascent towards us. We stopped to let them pass. They were Delawares, just returned from a hunting expedition. All, both men and women, were mounted on horseback, and drove along with them a considerable number of pack-mules, laden with the

furs they had taken, together with the buffalo-robes, kettles, and other articles of their travelling equipment, which, as well as their clothing and their weapons, had a worn and dingy look, as if they had seen hard service of late. At the rear of the party was an old man, who, as he came up, stopped his horse to speak to us. He rode a tough shaggy pony, with mane and tail well knotted with burrs, and a rusty Spanish bit in its mouth, to which, by way of reins, was attached a string of raw hide. His saddle, robbed probably from a Mexican, had no covering, being merely a tree of the Spanish form, with a piece of grizzly bear's skin laid over it, a pair of rude wooden stirrups attached, and, in the absence of girth, a thong of hide passing around the horse's belly. The rider's dark features and keen snaky eye were unequivocally Indian. He wore a buck-skin frock, which, like his fringed leggins, was well polished and blackened by grease and long service, and an old handkerchief was tied around his head. Resting on the saddle before him lay his rifle, a weapon in the use of which the Delawares are skilful, though, from its weight, the distant prairie Indians are too lazy to carry it.

"Who 's your chief?" he immediately inquired.

Henry Chatillon pointed to us. The old Delaware fixed his eyes intently upon us for a moment, and then sententiously remarked, —

"No good! Too young!" With this flattering comment he left us and rode after his people.

This tribe, the Delawares, once the peaceful allies of William Penn, the tributaries of the conquering Iroquois, are now the most adventurous and dreaded warriors upon the prairies. They make war upon remote tribes, the very names of which were unknown to their fathers in their ancient seats in Pennsylvania, and they push these new quarrels with true Indian rancor, sending out their war-parties as far as the Rocky Mountains, and into the Mexican territories. Their neighbors and former confederates, the Shawanoes, who are tolerable farmers, are in a prosperous condition; but the Delawares dwindle every year, from the number of men lost in their warlike expeditions.

Soon after leaving this party we saw, stretching on the right, the forests that follow the course of the Missouri, and the deep woody channel through which at this point it runs. At a distance in front were the white barracks of Fort Leavenworth, just visible through the trees upon an eminence above a bend of the river. A wide green meadow, as level as a lake, lay between us and the Missouri, and upon this, close to a line of trees that bordered a little brook, stood the tent of the captain and his companions, with their horses feeding around it; but they themselves were invisible. Wright, their muleteer, was there, seated on the tongue of the wagon, repairing his harness. Boisverd stood cleaning his rifle at the door of the tent, and Sorel lounged idly about. On closer examination, however, we discovered the cap-

tain's brother, Jack, sitting in the tent, at his old occupation of splicing trail-ropes. He welcomed us in his broad Irish brogue, and said that his brother was fishing in the river, and R—— gone to the garrison. They returned before sunset. Meanwhile we pitched our own tent not far off, and after supper a council was held, in which it was resolved to remain one day at Fort Leavenworth, and on the next to bid a final adieu to the frontier, or, in the phraseology of the region, to "jump off." Our deliberations were conducted by the ruddy light from a distant swell of the prairie where the long dry grass of last summer was on fire.

CHAPTER III.

FORT LEAVENWORTH.

On the next morning we rode to Fort Leavenworth. Colonel, now General Kearney, to whom I had had the honor of an introduction when at St. Louis, was just arrived, and received us at his quarters with the courtesy habitual to him. Fort Leavenworth is in fact no fort, being without defensive works, except two blockhouses. No rumors of war had as yet disturbed its tranquillity. In the square grassy area, surrounded by barracks and the quarters of the officers, the men were passing and repassing, or lounging among the trees; although not many weeks afterwards it presented a different scene, for here the offscourings of the frontier were congregated for the expedition against Santa Fé.

Passing through the garrison, we rode toward the Kickapoo village, five or six miles beyond. The path, a rather dubious and uncertain one, led us along the ridge of high bluffs that border the Missouri; and, by looking to the right or to the left, we could enjoy a strange contrast of scenery. On the left stretched the prairie, rising into swells and undulations, thickly sprinkled with groves, or gracefully expanding into wide grassy basins, of miles in

extent; while its curvatures, swelling against the horizon, were often surmounted by lines of sunny woods; a scene to which the freshness of the season and the peculiar mellowness of the atmosphere gave additional softness. Below us, on the right, was a tract of ragged and broken woods. We could look down on the tops of the trees, some living and some dead; some erect, others leaning at every angle, and others piled in masses together by the passage of a hurricane. Beyond their extreme verge the turbid waters of the Missouri were discernible through the boughs, rolling powerfully along at the foot of the woody declivities on its farther bank.

The path soon after led inland; and, as we crossed an open meadow, we saw a cluster of buildings on a rising ground before us, with a crowd of people surrounding them. They were the storehouse, cottage, and stables of the Kickapoo trader's establishment. Just at that moment, as it chanced, he was beset with half the Indians of the settlement. They had tied their wretched, neglected little ponies by dozens along the fences and out-houses, and were either lounging about the place, or crowding into the trading-house. Here were faces of various colors: red, green, white, and black, curiously intermingled and disposed over the visage in a variety of patterns. Calico shirts, red and blue blankets, brass ear-rings, wampum necklaces, appeared in profusion. The trader was a blue-eyed, open-faced man, who neither in his manners nor his appearance betrayed any of

the roughness of the frontier; though just at present he was obliged to keep a lynx eye on his customers, who, men and women, were climbing on his counter, and seating themselves among his boxes and bales.

The village itself was not far off, and sufficiently illustrated the condition of its unfortunate and self-abandoned occupants. Fancy to yourself a little swift stream, working its devious way down a woody valley; sometimes wholly hidden under logs and fallen trees, sometimes spreading into a broad, clear pool; and on its banks, in little nooks cleared away among the trees, miniature log-houses, in utter ruin and neglect. A labyrinth of narrow, obstructed paths connected these habitations one with another. Sometimes we met a stray calf, a pig, or a pony, belonging to some of the villagers, who usually lay in the sun in front of their dwellings, and looked on us with cold, suspicious eyes as we approached. Farther on, in place of the log-huts of the Kickapoos, we found the *pukwi* lodges of their neighbors, the Pottawattamies, whose condition seemed no better than theirs.

Growing tired at last, and exhausted by the excessive heat and sultriness of the day, we returned to our friend, the trader. By this time the crowd around him had dispersed, and left him at leisure. He invited us to his cottage, a little white-and-green building, in the style of the old French settlements, and ushered us into a neat, well-furnished room. The blinds were closed, and the heat and glare of

the sun excluded; the room was as cool as a cavern. It was neatly carpeted, too, and furnished in a manner that we hardly expected on the frontier. The sofas, chairs, tables, and a well-filled bookcase would not have disgraced an eastern city, though there were one or two little tokens that indicated the rather questionable civilization of the region. A pistol, loaded and capped, lay on the mantel-piece; and through the glass of the bookcase, peeping above the works of John Milton, glittered the handle of a very mischievous-looking knife.

Our host went out, and returned with iced water, glasses, and a bottle of excellent claret, — a refreshment most welcome in the extreme heat of the day; and soon after appeared a merry, laughing woman, who must have been, a year or two before, a very rich specimen of creole beauty. She came to say that lunch was ready in the next room. Our hostess evidently lived on the sunny side of life, and troubled herself with none of its cares. She sat down and entertained us while we were at table with anecdotes of fishing-parties, frolics, and the officers at the fort. Taking leave at length of the hospitable trader and his friend, we rode back to the garrison.

Shaw passed on to the camp, while I remained to call upon Colonel Kearney. I found him still at table. There sat our friend the captain, in the same remarkable habiliments in which we saw him at Westport; the black pipe, however, being for the present laid aside. He dangled his little cap in his

hand, and talked of steeple-chases, touching occasionally upon his anticipated exploits in buffalo-hunting. There, too, was R——, somewhat more elegantly attired. For the last time, we tasted the luxuries of civilization, and drank adieus to it in wine good enough to make us regret the leave-taking. Then, mounting, we rode together to the camp, where everything was in readiness for departure on the morrow.

CHAPTER IV.

"JUMPING OFF."

Our transatlantic companions were well equipped for the journey. They had a wagon drawn by six mules, and crammed with provisions for six months, besides ammunition enough for a regiment; spare rifles and fowling-pieces, ropes and harness, personal baggage, and a miscellaneous assortment of articles, which produced infinite embarrassment. They had also decorated their persons with telescopes and portable compasses, and carried English double-barrelled rifles of sixteen to the pound calibre, slung to their saddles in dragoon fashion.

By sunrise on the twenty-third of May we had breakfasted; the tents were levelled, the animals saddled and harnessed, and all was prepared. "*Avance donc!* get up!" cried Deslauriers to his mule. Wright, our friends' muleteer, after some swearing and lashing, got his insubordinate train in motion, and then the whole party filed from the ground. Thus we bade a long adieu to bed and board, and the principles of Blackstone's Commentaries. The day was a most auspicious one; and yet Shaw and I felt certain misgivings, which in the sequel proved but too well founded. We had just learned that though

R—— had taken it upon him to adopt this course without consulting us, not a single man in the party knew the way; and the absurdity of the proceeding soon became manifest. His plan was to strike the trail of several companies of dragoons, who last summer had made an expedition under Colonel Kearney to Fort Laramie, and by this means to reach the grand trail of the Oregon emigrants up the Platte.

We rode for an hour or two, when a familiar cluster of buildings appeared on a little hill. "Hallo!" shouted the Kickapoo trader from over his fence, "where are you going?" A few rather emphatic exclamations might have been heard among us, when we found that we had gone miles out of our way, and were not advanced an inch toward the Rocky Mountains. So we turned in the direction the trader indicated; and with the sun for a guide, began to trace a "bee-line" across the prairies. We struggled through copses and lines of wood; we waded brooks and pools of water; we traversed prairies as green as an emerald, expanding before us mile after mile, wider and more wild than the wastes Mazeppa rode over.

> "Man nor brute,
> Nor dint of hoof, nor print of foot,
> Lay in the wild luxuriant soil;
> No sign of travel; none of toil;
> The very air was mute."

Riding in advance, as we passed over one of these great plains, we looked back and saw the line of

scattered horsemen stretching for a mile or more; and, far in the rear, against the horizon, the white wagons creeping slowly along. "Here we are at last!" shouted the captain. And, in truth, we had struck upon the traces of a large body of horse. We turned joyfully and followed this new course, with tempers somewhat improved; and towards sunset encamped on a high swell of the prairie, at the foot of which a lazy stream soaked along through clumps of rank grass. It was getting dark. We turned the horses loose to feed. "Drive down the tent-pickets hard," said Henry Chatillon; "it is going to blow." We did so, and secured the tent as well as we could; for the sky had changed totally, and a fresh damp smell in the wind warned us that a stormy night was likely to succeed the hot, clear day. The prairie also wore a new aspect, and its vast swells had grown black and sombre under the shadow of the clouds. The thunder soon began to growl at a distance. Picketing and hobbling the horses among the rich grass at the foot of the slope where we encamped, we gained a shelter just as the rain began to fall; and sat at the opening of the tent, watching the proceedings of the captain. In defiance of the rain, he was stalking among the horses, wrapped in an old Scotch plaid. An extreme solicitude tormented him, lest some of his favorites should escape, or some accident should befall them; and he cast an anxious eye towards three wolves who were sneaking along over the dreary surface of

the plain, as if he dreaded some hostile demonstration on their part.

On the next morning we had gone but a mile or two when we came to an extensive belt of woods, through the midst of which ran a stream, wide, deep, and of an appearance particularly muddy and treacherous. Deslauriers was in advance with his cart; he jerked his pipe from his mouth, lashed his mules, and poured forth a volley of Canadian ejaculations. In plunged the cart, but midway it stuck fast. He leaped out knee-deep in water, and, by dint of *sacrés* and a vigorous application of the whip, urged the mules out of the slough. Then approached the long team and heavy wagon of our friends; but it paused on the brink.

"Now my advice is —" began the captain, who had been anxiously contemplating the muddy gulf.

"Drive on!" cried R——.

But Wright, the muleteer, apparently had not as yet decided the point in his own mind; and he sat still in his seat, on one of the shaft-mules, whistling in a low contemplative strain to himself.

"My advice is," resumed the captain, "that we unload; for I 'll bet any man five pounds that if we try to go through we shall stick fast."

"By the powers, we shall stick fast!" echoed Jack, the captain's brother, shaking his large head with an air of firm conviction.

"Drive on! drive on!" cried R——, petulantly.

"Well," observed the captain, turning to us as

we sat looking on, much edified by this by-play among our confederates, "I can only give my advice, and if people won't be reasonable, why, they won't, that's all!"

Meanwhile Wright had apparently made up his mind; for he suddenly began to shout forth a volley of oaths and curses, that, compared with the French imprecations of Deslauriers, sounded like the roaring of heavy cannon after the popping and sputtering of a bunch of Chinese crackers. At the same time he discharged a shower of blows upon his mules, who hastily dived into the mud, and drew the wagon lumbering after them. For a moment the issue was doubtful. Wright writhed about in his saddle, and swore and lashed like a madman; but who can count on a team of half-broken mules? At the most critical point, when all should have been harmony and combined effort, the perverse brutes fell into disorder, and huddled together in confusion on the farther bank. There was the wagon up to the hub in mud, and visibly settling every instant. There was nothing for it but to unload; then to dig away the mud from before the wheels with a spade, and lay a causeway of bushes and branches. This agreeable labor accomplished, the wagon at length emerged; but as some interruption of this sort occurred at least four or five times a day for a fortnight, our progress towards the Platte was not without its obstacles.

We travelled six or seven miles farther, and "nooned" near a brook. On the point of resuming

our journey, when the horses were all driven down to water, my homesick charger, Pontiac, made a sudden leap across, and set off at a round trot for the settlements. I mounted my remaining horse and started in pursuit. Making a circuit, I headed the runaway, hoping to drive him back to camp, but he instantly broke into a gallop, made a wide tour on the prairie, and got by me again. I tried this plan repeatedly with the same result; Pontiac was evidently disgusted with the prairie, so I abandoned it and tried another, trotting along gently behind him, in hopes that I might quietly get near enough to seize the trail-rope which was fastened to his neck, and dragged about a dozen feet behind him. The chase grew interesting. For mile after mile I followed the rascal with the utmost care not to alarm him, and gradually got nearer, until at length old Hendrick's nose was fairly brushed by the whisking tail of the unsuspecting Pontiac. Without drawing rein I slid softly to the ground; but my long heavy rifle encumbered me, and the low sound it made in striking the horn of the saddle startled him, he pricked up his ears and sprang off at a run. "My friend," thought I, remounting, "do that again and I will shoot you!"

Fort Leavenworth was about forty miles distant, and thither I determined to follow him. I made up my mind to spend a solitary and supperless night, and then set out again in the morning. One hope, however, remained. The creek where the wagon

had stuck was just before us; Pontiac might be thirsty with his run and stop there to drink. I kept as near him as possible, taking every precaution not to alarm him again; and the result proved as I had hoped, for he walked deliberately among the trees and stooped down to the water. I alighted, dragged old Hendrick through the mud, and with a feeling of infinite satisfaction picked up the slimy trail-rope, and twisted it three times round my hand. "Now let me see you get away again!" I thought, as I remounted. But Pontiac was exceedingly reluctant to turn back; Hendrick, too, who had evidently flattered himself with vain hopes, showed the utmost repugnance, and grumbled in a manner peculiar to himself at being compelled to face about. A smart cut of the whip restored his cheerfulness; and, dragging the recovered truant behind, I set out in search of the camp. An hour or two elapsed, when, near sunset, I saw the tents, standing on a swell of the prairie, beyond a line of woods, while the bands of horses were feeding in a low meadow close at hand. There sat Jack C——, cross-legged, in the sun, splicing a trail-rope; and the rest were lying on the grass, smoking and telling stories. That night we enjoyed a serenade from the wolves, more lively than any with which they had yet favored us; and in the morning one of the musicians appeared, not many rods from the tents, quietly seated among the horses, looking at us with a pair of large gray eyes; but perceiving a rifle levelled at him, he leaped up and made off in hot haste.

I pass by the following day or two of our journey, for nothing occurred worthy of record. Should any one of my readers ever be impelled to visit the prairies, and should he choose the route of the Platte (the best, perhaps, that can be adopted), I can assure him that he need not think to enter at once upon the paradise of his imagination. A dreary preliminary, a protracted crossing of the threshold, awaits him before he finds himself fairly upon the verge of the "great American desert," — those barren wastes, the haunts of the buffalo and the Indian, where the very shadow of civilization lies a hundred leagues behind him. The intervening country, the wide and fertile belt that extends for several hundred miles beyond the extreme frontier, will probably answer tolerably well to his preconceived ideas of the prairie; for this it is from which picturesque tourists, painters, poets, and novelists, who have seldom penetrated farther, have derived their conceptions of the whole region. If he has a painter's eye, he may find his period of probation not wholly void of interest. The scenery, though tame, is graceful and pleasing. Here are level plains, too wide for the eye to measure; green undulations, like motionless swells of the ocean; abundance of streams, followed through all their windings by lines of woods and scattered groves. But let him be as enthusiastic as he may, he will find enough to damp his ardor. His wagons will stick in the mud; his horses will break loose; harness will give way; and axle-trees prove unsound. His

bed will be a soft one, consisting often of black mud of the richest consistency. As for food, he must content himself with biscuit and salt provisions; for, strange as it may seem, this tract of country produces very little game. As he advances, indeed, he will see, mouldering in the grass by his path, the vast antlers of the elk, and farther on the whitened skulls of the buffalo, once swarming over this now deserted region. Perhaps, like us, he may journey for a fortnight, and see not so much as the hoof-print of a deer; in the spring, not even a prairie-hen is to be had.

Yet, to compensate him for this unlooked-for deficiency of game, he will find himself beset with "varmints" innumerable. The wolves will entertain him with a concert at night, and skulk around him by day, just beyond rifle-shot; his horse will step into badger-holes; from every marsh and mud-puddle will arise the bellowing, croaking, and trilling of legions of frogs, infinitely various in color, shape, and dimensions. A profusion of snakes will glide away from under his horse's feet, or quietly visit him in his tent at night; while the pertinacious humming of unnumbered mosquitoes will banish sleep from his eyelids. When, thirsty with a long ride in the scorching sun over some boundless reach of prairie, he comes at length to a pool of water, and alights to drink, he discovers a troop of young tadpoles sporting in the bottom of his cup. Add to this, that, all the morning, the sun beats upon him

with a sultry, penetrating heat, and that, with provoking regularity, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, a thunderstorm rises and drenches him to the skin.

One day, after a protracted morning's ride, we stopped to rest at noon upon the open prairie. No trees were in sight; but close at hand a little dribbling brook was twisting from side to side through a hollow; now forming holes of stagnant water, and now gliding over the mud in a scarcely perceptible current, among a growth of sickly bushes, and great clumps of tall rank grass. The day was excessively hot and oppressive. The horses and mules were rolling on the prairie to refresh themselves, or feeding among the bushes in the hollow. We had dined; and Deslauriers, puffing at his pipe, knelt on the grass, scrubbing our service of tin-plate. Shaw lay in the shade, under the cart, to rest for a while before the word should be given to "catch up." Henry Chatillon, before lying down, was looking about for signs of snakes, the only living things that he feared, and uttering various ejaculations of disgust at finding several suspicious-looking holes close to the cart. I sat leaning against the wheel in a scanty strip of shade, making a pair of hobbles to replace those which my contumacious steed Pontiac had broken the night before. The camp of our friends, a rod or two distant, presented the same scene of lazy tranquillity.

"Hallo!" cried Henry, looking up from his in-

spection of the snake-holes, "here comes the old captain."

The captain approached, and stood for a moment contemplating us in silence.

"I say, Parkman," he began, "look at Shaw there, asleep under the cart, with the tar dripping off the hub of the wheel on his shoulder."

At this Shaw got up, with his eyes half opened, and feeling the part indicated, found his hand glued fast to his red flannel shirt.

"He 'll look well, when he gets among the squaws, won't he?" observed the captain, with a grin.

He then crawled under the cart, and began to tell stories, of which his stock was inexhaustible. Yet every moment he would glance nervously at the horses. At last he jumped up in great excitement. "See that horse! There — that fellow just walking over the hill! By Jove! he 's off. It 's your big horse, Shaw; no, it is n't, it 's Jack's. Jack! Jack! hallo, Jack!" Jack, thus invoked, jumped up and stared vacantly at us.

"Go and catch your horse, if you don't want to lose him," roared the captain.

Jack instantly set off at a run through the grass, his broad trousers flapping about his feet. The captain gazed anxiously till he saw that the horse was caught; then he sat down, with a countenance of thoughtfulness and care.

"I tell you what it is," he said, "this will never do at all. We shall lose every horse in the band

some day or other, and then a pretty plight we should be in! Now I am convinced that the only way for us is to have every man in the camp stand horse-guard in rotation whenever we stop. Supposing a hundred Pawnees should jump up out of that ravine, all yelling and flapping their buffalo robes, in the way they do! Why, in two minutes, not a hoof would be in sight." We reminded the captain that a hundred Pawnees would probably demolish the horse-guard if he were to resist their depredations.

"At any rate," pursued the captain, evading the point, "our whole system is wrong; I 'm convinced of it; it is totally unmilitary. Why, the way we travel, strung out over the prairie for a mile, an enemy might attack the foremost men, and cut them off before the rest could come up."

"We are not in an enemy's country yet," said Shaw; "when we are, we 'll travel together."

"Then," said the captain, "we might be attacked in camp. We 've no sentinels; we 'camp in disorder; no precautions at all to guard against surprise. My own convictions are, that we ought to 'camp in a hollow-square, with the fires in the centre; and have sentinels, and a regular password appointed for every night. Beside, there should be videttes, riding in advance, to find a place for the camp and give warning of an enemy. These are my convictions. I don't want to dictate to any man. I give advice to the best of my judgment, that 's all; and then let people do as they please."

His plan of sending out videttes seemed particularly dear to him; and as no one else was disposed to second his views on this point, he took it into his head to ride forward that afternoon himself.

"Come, Parkman," said he, "will you go with me?"

We set out together, and rode a mile or two in advance. The captain, in the course of twenty years' service in the British army, had seen something of life; and being naturally a pleasant fellow, he was a very entertaining companion. He cracked jokes and told stories for an hour or two; until, looking back, we saw the prairie behind us stretching away to the horizon, without a horseman or a wagon in sight.

"Now," said the captain, "I think the videttes had better stop till the main body comes up."

I was of the same opinion. There was a thick growth of woods just before us, with a stream running through them. Having crossed this, we found on the other side a level meadow, half encircled by the trees; and, fastening our horses to some bushes, we sat down on the grass, while, with an old stump of a tree for a target, I began to display the superiority of the renowned rifle of the backwoods over the foreign innovation borne by the captain. At length voices could be heard in the distance, behind the trees.

"There they come," said the captain; "let's go and see how they get through the creek."

We mounted and rode to the bank of the stream,

where the trail crossed it. It ran in a deep hollow, full of trees. As we looked down, we saw a confused crowd of horsemen riding through the water; and among the dingy habiliments of our party glittered the uniforms of four dragoons.

Shaw came whipping his horse up the bank, in advance of the rest, with a somewhat indignant countenance. The first word he spoke was a blessing fervently invoked on the head of R——, who was riding, with a crestfallen air, in the rear. Thanks to the ingenious devices of this gentleman, we had missed the track entirely, and wandered, not towards the Platte, but to the village of the Iowa Indians. This we learned from the dragoons, who had lately deserted from Fort Leavenworth. They told us that our best plan now was to keep to the northward until we should strike the trail formed by several parties of Oregon emigrants, who had that season set out from St. Joseph, in Missouri.

In extremely bad temper, we encamped on this ill-starred spot, while the deserters, whose case admitted of no delay, rode rapidly forward. On the day following, striking the St. Joseph's trail, we turned our horses' heads towards Fort Laramie, then about seven hundred miles to the westward.

CHAPTER V.

THE "BIG BLUE."

THE great medley of Oregon and California emigrants at their camps around Independence had heard reports that several additional parties were on the point of setting out from St. Joseph farther to the northward. The prevailing impression was that these were Mormons, twenty-three hundred in number; and a great alarm was excited in consequence. The people of Illinois and Missouri, who composed by far the greater part of the emigrants, have never been on the best terms with the "Latter Day Saints;" and it is notorious throughout the country how much blood has been spilt in their feuds, even far within the limits of the settlements. No one could predict what would be the result, when large armed bodies of these fanatics should encounter the most impetuous and reckless of their old enemies on the broad prairie, far beyond the reach of law or military force. The women and children at Independence raised a great outcry; the men themselves were seriously alarmed; and, as I learned, they sent to Colonel Kearney, requesting an escort of dragoons as far as the Platte. This was refused; and, as the sequel proved, there was no occasion for it. The St. Joseph

emigrants were as good Christians and as zealous Mormon-haters as the rest; and the very few families of the "Saints" who passed out this season by the route of the Platte remained behind until the great tide of emigration had gone by, standing in quite as much awe of the "gentiles" as the latter did of them.

We were now upon this St. Joseph trail. It was evident, by the traces, that large parties were a few days in advance of us; and as we too supposed them to be Mormons, we had some apprehension of interruption.

The journey was monotonous. One day we rode on for hours, without seeing a tree or a bush: before, behind, and on either side, stretched the vast expanse, rolling in a succession of graceful swells, covered with the unbroken carpet of fresh green grass. Here and there a crow, a raven, or a turkey-buzzard, relieved the uniformity.

"What shall we do to-night for wood and water?" we began to ask of each other; for the sun was within an hour of setting. At length a dark green speck appeared, far off on the right: it was the top of a tree, peering over a swell of the prairie; and, leaving the trail, we made all haste towards it. It proved to be the vanguard of a cluster of bushes and low trees, that surrounded some pools of water in an extensive hollow; so we encamped on the rising ground near it.

Shaw and I were sitting in the tent, when Deslau-

riers thrust his brown face and old felt hat into the opening, and, dilating his eyes to their utmost extent, announced supper. There were the tin cups and the iron spoons, arranged in order on the grass, and the coffee-pot predominant in the midst. The meal was soon despatched; but Henry Chatillon still sat cross-legged, dallying with the remnant of his coffee, the beverage in universal use upon the prairie, and an especial favorite with him. He preferred it in its virgin flavor, unimpaired by sugar or cream; and on the present occasion it met his entire approval, being exceedingly strong, or, as he expressed it, "right black."

It was a gorgeous sunset; and the ruddy glow of the sky was reflected from some extensive pools of water among the shadowy copses in the meadow below.

"I must have a bath to-night," said Shaw. "How is it, Deslauriers? Any chance for a swim down there?"

"Ah! I cannot tell; just as you please, Monsieur," replied Deslauriers, shrugging his shoulders, perplexed by his ignorance of English, and extremely anxious to conform in all respects to the opinions and wishes of his *bourgeois*.

"Look at his moccason," said I. It had evidently been lately immersed in a profound abyss of black mud.

"Come," said Shaw; "at any rate we can see for ourselves."

We set out together; and as we approached the bushes, which were at some distance, we found the ground becoming rather treacherous. We could only get along by stepping upon large clumps of tall rank grass, with fathomless gulfs between, like innumerable little quaking islands in an ocean of mud, where a false step would have involved our boots in a catastrophe like that which had befallen Deslauriers's moccasons. The thing looked desperate; we separated, to search in different directions, Shaw going off to the right, while I kept straight forward. At last I came to the edge of the bushes, — they were young water-willows, covered with their caterpillar-like blossoms, but intervening between them and the last grass-clump was a black and deep slough, over which, by a vigorous exertion, I contrived to jump. Then I shouldered my way through the willows, trampling them down by main force, till I came to a wide stream of water, three inches deep, languidly creeping along over a bottom of sleek mud. My arrival produced a great commotion. A huge green bull-frog uttered an indignant croak, and jumped off the bank with a loud splash; his webbed feet twinkled above the surface, as he jerked them energetically upward, and I could see him ensconcing himself in the unresisting slime at the bottom, whence several large air-bubbles struggled lazily to the top. Some little spotted frogs followed the patriarch's example; and then three turtles, not larger than a dollar, tumbled themselves off a broad "lily pad,"

where they had been reposing. At the same time a snake, gayly striped with black and yellow, glided out from the bank, and writhed across to the other side; and a small stagnant pool into which my foot had inadvertently pushed a stone was instantly alive with a congregation of black tadpoles.

"Any chance for a bath where you are?" called out Shaw, from a distance.

The answer was not encouraging. I retreated through the willows, and rejoining my companion, we proceeded to push our researches in company. Not far on the right, a rising ground, covered with trees and bushes, seemed to sink down abruptly to the water, and give hope of better success; so towards this we directed our steps. When we reached the place we found it no easy matter to get along between the hill and the water, impeded as we were by a growth of stiff, obstinate young birch-trees, laced together by grape-vines. In the twilight we now and then, to support ourselves, snatched at the touch-me-not stem of some ancient sweetbrier. Shaw, who was in advance, suddenly uttered an emphatic monosyllable; and, looking up, I saw him with one hand grasping a sapling, and one foot immersed in the water, from which he had forgotten to withdraw it, his whole attention being engaged in contemplating the movements of a water-snake, about five feet long, curiously checkered with black and green, who was deliberately swimming across the pool. There being no stick or stone at hand to pelt

him with, we looked at him for a time in silent disgust, and then pushed forward. Our perseverance was at last rewarded; for, several rods farther on, we emerged upon a little level grassy nook among the brushwood, and by an extraordinary dispensation of fortune, the weeds and floating sticks, which elsewhere covered the pool, seemed to have drawn apart, and left a few yards of clear water just in front of this favored spot. We sounded it with a stick; it was four feet deep: we lifted a specimen in our closed hands; it seemed reasonably transparent, so we decided that the time for action was arrived. But our ablutions were suddenly interrupted by ten thousand punctures, like poisoned needles, and the humming of myriads of overgrown mosquitoes, rising in all directions from their native mud and swarming to the feast. We were fain to beat a retreat with all possible speed.

We made towards the tents, much refreshed by the bath, which the heat of the weather, joined to our prejudices, had rendered very desirable.

"What's the matter with the captain? look at him!" said Shaw. The captain stood alone on the prairie, swinging his hat violently around his head, and lifting first one foot and then the other, without moving from the spot. First he looked down to the ground with an air of supreme abhorrence; then he gazed upward with a perplexed and indignant countenance, as if trying to trace the flight of an unseen enemy. We called to know what was the matter;

but he replied only by execrations directed against some unknown object. We approached, when our ears were saluted by a droning sonnd, as if twenty bee-hives had been overturned at once. The air above was full of large black insects, in a state of great commotion, and multitudes were flying about just above the tops of the grass-blades.

"Don't be afraid," called the captain, observing us recoil. "The brutes won't sting."

At this I knocked one down with my hat, and discovered him to be no other than a "dor-bug;" and, looking closer, we found the ground thickly perforated with their holes.

We took a hasty leave of this flourishing colony, and walking up the rising ground to the tents, found Deslauriers's fire still glowing brightly. We sat down around it, and Shaw began to expatiate on the admirable facilities for bathing that we had discovered, recommending the captain by all means to go down there before breakfast in the morning. The captain was in the act of remarking that he could n't have believed it possible, when he suddenly interrupted himself, and clapped his hand to his cheek, exclaiming that "those infernal humbugs were at him again." In fact, we began to hear sounds as if bullets were humming over our heads. In a moment something rapped me sharply on the forehead, then upon the neck, and immediately I felt an indefinite number of sharp wiry claws in active motion, as if their owner were bent on pushing

his explorations farther. I seized him, and dropped him into the fire. Our party speedily broke up, and we adjourned to our respective tents, where, closing the opening fast, we hoped to be exempt from invasion. But all precaution was fruitless. The dor-bugs hummed through the tent, and marched over our faces until daylight; when, opening our blankets, we found several dozen clinging there with the utmost tenacity. The first object that met our eyes in the morning was Deslauriers, who seemed to be apostrophizing his frying-pan, which he held by the handle, at arm's length. It appeared that he had left it at night by the fire; and the bottom was now covered with dor-bugs, firmly imbedded. Hundreds of others, curiously parched and shrivelled, lay scattered among the ashes.

The horses and mules were turned loose to feed. We had just taken our seats at breakfast, or rather reclined in the classic mode, when an exclamation from Henry Chatillon, and a shout of alarm from the captain, gave warning of some casualty, and looking up, we saw the whole band of animals, twenty-three in number, filing off for the settlements, the incorrigible Pontiac at their head, jumping along with hobbled feet, at a gait much more rapid than graceful. Three or four of us ran to cut them off, dashing as best we might through the tall grass, which was glittering with dewdrops. After a race of a mile or more, Shaw caught a horse. Tying the trail-rope by way of bridle round the animal's jaw,

and leaping upon his back, he got in advance of the remaining fugitives, while we, soon bringing them together, drove them in a crowd up to the tents, where each man caught and saddled his own. Then were heard lamentations and curses; for half the horses had broken their hobbles, and many were seriously galled by attempting to run in fetters.

It was late that morning before we were on the march; and early in the afternoon we were compelled to encamp, for a thunder-gust came up and suddenly enveloped us in whirling sheets of rain. With much ado we pitched our tents amid the tempest, and all night long the thunder bellowed and growled over our heads. In the morning light peaceful showers succeeded the cataracts of rain, that had been drenching us through the canvas of our tents. About noon, when there were some treacherous indications of fair weather, we got in motion again.

Not a breath of air stirred over the free and open prairie; the clouds were like light piles of cotton; and where the blue sky was visible, it wore a hazy and languid aspect. The sun beat down upon us with a sultry, penetrating heat almost insupportable, and as our party crept slowly along over the interminable level, the horses hung their heads as they waded fetlock deep through the mud, and the men slouched into the easiest position upon the saddle. At last, towards evening, the old familiar black heads of thunder-clouds rose fast above the horizon,

and the same deep muttering of distant thunder that had become the ordinary accompaniment of our afternoon's journey began to roll hoarsely over the prairie. Only a few minutes elapsed before the whole sky was densely shrouded, and the prairie and some clusters of woods in front assumed a purple hue beneath the inky shadows. Suddenly from the densest fold of the cloud the flash leaped out, quivering again and again down to the edge of the prairie; and at the same instant came the sharp burst and the long rolling peal of the thunder. A cool wind, filled with the smell of rain, just then overtook us, levelling the tall grass by the side of the path.

"Come on; we must ride for it!" shouted Shaw, rushing by at full speed, his led horse snorting at his side. The whole party broke into full gallop, and made for the trees in front. Passing these, we found beyond them a meadow which they half enclosed. We rode pell-mell upon the ground, leaped from horseback, tore off our saddles; and in a moment each man was kneeling at his horse's feet. The hobbles were adjusted, and the animals turned loose; then, as the wagons came wheeling rapidly to the spot, we seized upon the tent-poles, and just as the storm broke, we were prepared to receive it. It came upon us almost with the darkness of night: the trees, which were close at hand, were completely shrouded by the roaring torrents of rain.

We were sitting in the tent when Deslauriers, with his broad felt hat hanging about his ears, and

his shoulders glistening with rain, thrust in his head.

"Voulez-vous du souper, tout de suite? I can make fire, sous la charette — I b'lieve so — I try."

"Never mind supper, man; come in out of the rain."

Deslauriers accordingly crouched in the entrance, for modesty would not permit him to intrude farther.

Our tent was none of the best defence against such a cataract. The rain could not enter bodily, but it beat through the canvas in a fine drizzle, that wetted us just as effectually. We sat upon our saddles with faces of the utmost surliness, while the water dropped from the visors of our caps, and trickled down our cheeks. My india-rubber cloak conducted twenty little rapid streamlets to the ground; and Shaw's blanket coat was saturated like a sponge. But what most concerned us was the sight of several puddles of water rapidly accumulating; one, in particular, that was gathering around the tent-pole, threatened to overspread the whole area within the tent, holding forth but an indifferent promise of a comfortable night's rest. Towards sunset, however, the storm ceased as suddenly as it began. A bright streak of clear red sky appeared above the western verge of the prairie, the horizontal rays of the sinking sun streamed through it, and glittered in a thousand prismatic colors upon the dripping groves and the prostrate grass. The pools in the tent dwindled and sunk into the saturated soil.

But all our hopes were delusive. Scarcely had night set in when the tumult broke forth anew. The thunder here is not like the tame thunder of the Atlantic coast. Bursting with a terrific crash directly above our heads, it roared over the boundless waste of prairie, seeming to roll around the whole circle of the firmament with a peculiar and awful reverberation. The lightning flashed all night, playing with its livid glare upon the neighboring trees, revealing the vast expanse of the plain, and then leaving us shut in as if by a palpable wall of darkness.

It did not disturb us much. Now and then a peal awakened us, and made us conscious of the electric battle that was raging, and of the floods that dashed upon the stanch canvas over our heads. We lay upon india-rubber cloths, placed between our blankets and the soil. For a while they excluded the water to admiration; but when at length it accumulated and began to run over the edges, they served equally well to retain it, so that towards the end of the night we were unconsciously reposing in small pools of rain.

On finally awaking in the morning the prospect was not a cheerful one. The rain no longer poured in torrents; but it pattered with a quiet pertinacity upon the strained and saturated canvas. We disengaged ourselves from our blankets, every fibre of which glistened with little bead-like drops of water, and looked out in the vain hope of discovering some token of fair weather. The clouds, in lead-colored

volumes, rested upon the dismal verge of the prairie, or hung sluggishly overhead, while the earth wore an aspect no more attractive than the heavens, exhibiting nothing but pools of water, grass beaten down, and mud well trampled by our mules and horses. Our companions' tent, with an air of forlorn and passive misery, and their wagons in like manner drenched and woe-begone, stood not far off. The captain was just returning from his morning's inspection of the horses. He stalked through the mist and rain, with his plaid around his shoulders, his little pipe, dingy as an antiquarian relic, projecting from beneath his moustache, and his brother Jack at his heels.

At noon the sky was clear, and we set out, trailing through mud and slime six inches deep. That night we were spared the customary infliction of the shower-bath.

On the next afternoon we were moving slowly along, not far from a patch of woods which lay on the right. Jack C—— rode a little in advance, —

"The livelong day he had not spoke;"

when suddenly he faced about, pointed to the woods, and roared out to his brother, —

"O Bill! here 's a cow."

The captain instantly galloped forward, and he and Jack made a vain attempt to capture the prize; but the cow, with a well-grounded distrust of their intentions, took refuge among the trees. R—— joined them, and they soon drove her out. We watched

their evolutions as they galloped around her, trying in vain to noose her with their trail-ropes, which they had converted into *lariettes* for the occasion. At length they resorted to milder measures, and the cow was driven along with the party. Soon after the usual thunder-storm came up, the wind blowing with such fury that the streams of rain flew almost horizontally along the prairie, roaring like a cataract. The horses turned tail to the storm, and stood hanging their heads, bearing the infliction with an air of meekness and resignation; while we drew our heads between our shoulders, and crouched forward, so as to make our backs serve as a pent-house for the rest of our persons. Meanwhile the cow, taking advantage of the tumult, ran off, to the great discomfiture of the captain. In defiance of the storm, he pulled his cap tight over his brows, jerked a huge buffalo-pistol from his holster, and set out at full speed after her. This was the last we saw of them for some time, the mist and rain making an impenetrable veil, but at length we heard the captain's shout, and saw him looming through the tempest, the picture of a Hibernian cavalier, with his cocked pistol held aloft for safety's sake, and a countenance of anxiety and excitement. The cow trotted before him, but exhibited evident signs of an intention to run off again, and the captain was roaring to us to head her. But the rain had got in behind our coat-collars, and was travelling over our necks in numerous little streamlets, and being afraid to move our heads, for fear of

admitting more, we sat stiff and immovable, looking at the captain askance, and laughing at his frantic movements. At last the cow made a sudden plunge and ran off; the captain grasped his pistol firmly, spurred his horse, and galloped after, with evident designs of mischief. In a moment we heard the faint report, deadened by the rain, and then the conqueror and his victim reappeared, the latter shot through the body, and quite helpless. Not long after, the storm moderated, and we advanced again. The cow walked painfully along under the charge of Jack, to whom the captain had committed her, while he himself rode forward in his old capacity of vidette. We were approaching a long line of trees, that followed a stream stretching across our path, far in front, when we beheld the vidette galloping towards us apparently much excited, but with a broad grin on his face.

"Let that cow drop behind!" he shouted to us; "here 's her owners."

And, in fact, as we approached the line of trees, a large white object, like a tent, was visible behind them. On approaching, however, we found, instead of the expected Mormon camp, nothing but the lonely prairie, and a large white rock standing by the path. The cow, therefore, resumed her place in our procession. She walked on until we encamped, when R——, approaching with his English double-barrelled rifle, took aim at her heart, and discharged into it first one bullet and then the other. She was then butchered

on the most approved principles of woodcraft, and furnished a very welcome item to our somewhat limited bill of fare.

In a day or two more we reached the river called the "Big Blue." By titles equally elegant, almost all the streams of this region are designated. We had struggled through ditches and little brooks all that morning; but on traversing the dense woods that lined the banks of the Blue, we found that more formidable difficulties awaited us, for the stream, swollen by the rains, was wide, deep, and rapid.

No sooner were we on the spot than R—— flung off his clothes, and swam across, or splashed through the shallows, with the end of a rope between his teeth. We all looked on in admiration, wondering what might be the object of this energetic preparation; but soon we heard him shouting: "Give that rope a turn round that stump. You, Sorel; do you hear? Look sharp, now, Boisverd. Come over to this side, some of you, and help me." The men to whom these orders were directed paid not the least attention to them, though they were poured out without pause or intermission. Henry Chatillon directed the work, and it proceeded quietly and rapidly. R——'s sharp brattling voice might have been heard incessantly; and he was leaping about with the utmost activity. His commands were rather amusingly inconsistent; for when he saw that the men would not do as he told them, he accommodated himself to circumstances, and with the utmost

vehemence ordered them to do precisely that which they were at the time engaged upon, no doubt recollecting the story of Mahomet and the refractory mountain. Shaw smiled; R—— observed it, and, approaching with a countenance of indignation, began to vapor a little, but was instantly reduced to silence.

The raft was at length complete. We piled our goods upon it, with the exception of our guns, which each man chose to retain in his own keeping. Sorel, Boisverd, Wright, and Deslauriers took their stations at the four corners, to hold it together, and swim across with it; and in a moment more all our earthly possessions were floating on the turbid waters of the Big Blue. We sat on the bank, anxiously watching the result, until we saw the raft safe landed in a little cove far down on the opposite bank. The empty wagons were easily passed across; and then, each man mounting a horse, we rode through the stream, the stray animals following of their own accord.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PLATTE AND THE DESERT.

We were now at the end of our solitary journeyings along the St. Joseph trail. On the evening of the twenty-third of May we encamped near its junction with the old legitimate trail of the Oregon emigrants. We had ridden long that afternoon, trying in vain to find wood and water, until at length we saw the sunset sky reflected from a pool encircled by bushes and rocks. The water lay in the bottom of a hollow, the smooth prairie gracefully rising in ocean-like swells on every side. We pitched our tents by it; not, however, before the keen eye of Henry Chatillon had discerned some unusual object upon the faintly-defined outline of the distant swell. But in the moist, hazy atmosphere of the evening, nothing could be clearly distinguished. As we lay around the fire after supper, a low and distant sound, strange enough amid the loneliness of the prairie, reached our ears, — peals of laughter, and the faint voices of men and women. For eight days we had not encountered a human being, and this singular warning of their vicinity had an effect extremely impressive.

About dark a sallow-faced fellow descended the hill on horseback, and splashing through the pool, rode up to the tents. He was enveloped in a huge cloak, and his broad felt hat was weeping about his ears with the drizzling moisture of the evening. Another followed, a stout, square-built, intelligent-looking man, who announced himself as leader of an emigrant party, encamped a mile in advance of us. About twenty wagons, he said, were with him; the rest of his party were on the other side of the Big Blue, waiting for a woman who was in the pains of childbirth, and quarrelling meanwhile among themselves.

These were the first emigrants that we had overtaken, although we had found abundant and melancholy traces of their progress throughout the course of the journey. Sometimes we passed the grave of one who had sickened and died on the way. The earth was usually torn up, and covered thickly with wolf-tracks. Some had escaped this violation. One morning, a piece of plank, standing upright on the summit of a grassy hill, attracted our notice, and riding up to it, we found the following words very roughly traced upon it, apparently with a red-hot piece of iron: —

MARY ELLIS.
DIED MAY 7th, 1845.
AGED TWO MONTHS.

Such tokens were of common occurrence.

We were late in breaking up our camp on the fol-

lowing morning, and scarcely had we ridden a mile when we saw, far in advance of us, drawn against the horizon, a line of objects stretching at regular intervals along the level edge of the prairie. An intervening swell soon hid them from sight, until, ascending it a quarter of an hour after, we saw close before us the emigrant caravan, with its heavy white wagons creeping on in slow procession, and a large drove of cattle following behind. Half a dozen yellow-visaged Missourians, mounted on horseback, were cursing and shouting among them, their lank angular proportions enveloped in brown homespun, evidently cut and adjusted by the hands of a domestic female tailor. As we approached, they called out to us: "How are ye, boys? Are ye for Oregon or California?"

As we pushed rapidly by the wagons, children's faces were thrust out from the white coverings to look at us; while the care-worn, thin-featured matron, or the buxom girl, seated in front, suspended the knitting on which most of them were engaged to stare at us with wondering curiosity. By the side of each wagon stalked the proprietor, urging on his patient oxen, who shouldered heavily along, inch by inch, on their interminable journey. It was easy to see that fear and dissension prevailed among them; some of the men — but these, with one exception, were bachelors — looked wistfully upon us as we rode lightly and swiftly by, and then impatiently at their own lumbering wagons and heavy-gaited oxen.

Others were unwilling to advance at all, until the party they had left behind should have rejoined them. Many were murmuring against the leader they had chosen, and wished to depose him; and this discontent was fomented by some ambitious spirits, who had hopes of succeeding in his place. The women were divided between regrets for the homes they had left and fear of the deserts and savages before them.

We soon left them far behind, and hoped that we had taken a final leave; but our companions' wagon stuck so long in a deep muddy ditch that before it was extricated the van of the emigrant caravan appeared again, descending a ridge close at hand. Wagon after wagon plunged through the mud; and as it was nearly noon, and the place promised shade and water, we saw with satisfaction that they were resolved to encamp. Soon the wagons were wheeled into a circle: the cattle were grazing over the meadow, and the men, with sour, sullen faces, were looking about for wood and water. They seemed to meet but indifferent success. As we left the ground, I saw a tall, slouching fellow, with the nasal accent of "down east," contemplating the contents of his tin cup, which he had just filled with water.

"Look here, you," said he; "it's chock-full of animals!"

The cup, as he held it out, exhibited in fact an extraordinary variety and profusion of animal and vegetable life.

Riding up the little hill, and looking back on the

meadow, we could easily see that all was not right in the camp of the emigrants. The men were crowded together, and an angry discussion seemed to be going forward. R—— was missing from his wonted place in the line, and the captain told us that he had remained behind to get his horse shod by a blacksmith attached to the emigrant party. Something whispered in our ears that mischief was on foot; we kept on, however, and coming soon to a stream of tolerable water, we stopped to rest and dine. Still the absentee lingered behind. At last, at the distance of a mile, he and his horse suddenly appeared, sharply defined against the sky on the summit of a hill; and close behind, a huge white object rose slowly into view.

"What is that blockhead bringing with him now?"

A moment dispelled the mystery. Slowly and solemnly, one behind the other, four long trains of oxen and four emigrant wagons rolled over the crest of the hill and gravely descended, while R—— rode in state in the van. It seems that, during the process of shoeing the horse, the smothered dissensions among the emigrants suddenly broke into open rupture. Some insisted on pushing forward, some on remaining where they were, and some on going back. Kearsley, their captain, threw up his command in disgust. "And now, boys," said he, "if any of you are for going ahead, just you come along with me."

Four wagons, with ten men, one woman, and one small child, made up the force of the "go-ahead" faction, and R——, with his usual proclivity toward

mischief, invited them to join our party. Fear of the Indians — for I can conceive no other motive — must have induced him to court so burdensome an alliance. At all events, the proceeding was a cool one. The men who joined us, it is true, were all that could be desired; rude indeed in manners, but frank, manly, and intelligent. To tell them we could not travel with them was out of the question. I merely reminded Kearsley that if his oxen could not keep up with our mules he must expect to be left behind, as we could not consent to be farther delayed on the journey; but he immediately replied, that his oxen "*should* keep up; and if they could n't, why, he allowed, he 'd find out how to make 'em."

On the next day, as it chanced, our English companions broke the axle-tree of their wagon, and down came the whole cumbrous machine lumbering into the bed of a brook. Here was a day's work cut out for us. Meanwhile our emigrant associates kept on their way, and so vigorously did they urge forward their powerful oxen, that, what with the broken axle-tree and other mishaps, it was full a week before we overtook them; when at length we discovered them, one afternoon, crawling quietly along the sandy brink of the Platte. But meanwhile various incidents occurred to ourselves.

It was probable that at this stage of our journey the Pawnees would attempt to rob us. We began therefore to stand guard in turn, dividing the night into three watches, and appointing two men for each.

Deslauriers and I held guard together. We did not march with military precision to and fro before the tents: our discipline was by no means so strict. We wrapped ourselves in our blankets, and sat down by the fire; and Deslauriers, combining his culinary functions with his duties as sentinel, employed himself in boiling the head of an antelope for our breakfast. Yet we were models of vigilance in comparison with some of the party; for the ordinary practice of the guard was to lay his rifle on the ground, and, enveloping his nose in his blanket, meditate on his mistress, or whatever subject best pleased him. This is all well enough when among Indians who do not habitually proceed further in their hostility than robbing travellers of their horses and mules, though, indeed, a Pawnee's forbearance is not always to be trusted; but in certain regions farther to the west, the guard must beware how he exposes his person to the light of the fire, lest some keen-eyed skulking marksman should let fly a bullet or an arrow from the darkness.

Among various tales that circulated around our camp-fire was one told by Boisverd, and not inappropriate here. He was trapping with several companions on the skirts of the Blackfoot country. The man on guard, knowing that it behooved him to put forth his utmost precaution, kept aloof from the fire-light, and sat watching intently on all sides. At length he was aware of a dark, crouching figure, stealing noiselessly into the circle of the light. He hastily cocked his rifle, but the sharp click of the

lock caught the ear of the Blackfoot, whose senses were all on the alert. Raising his arrow, already fitted to the string, he shot it in the direction of the sound. So sure was his aim, that he drove it through the throat of the unfortunate guard, and then, with a loud yell, bounded from the camp.

As I looked at the partner of my watch, puffing and blowing over his fire, it occurred to me that he might not prove the most efficient auxiliary in time of trouble.

"Deslauriers," said I, "would you run away if the Pawnees should fire at us?"

"Ah! oui, oui, Monsieur!" he replied very decisively.

At this instant a whimsical variety of voices, — barks, howls, yelps, and whines, — all mingled together, sounded from the prairie, not far off, as if a conclave of wolves of every age and sex were assembled there. Deslauriers looked up from his work with a laugh, and began to imitate this medley of sounds with a ludicrous accuracy. At this they were repeated with redoubled emphasis, the musician being apparently indignant at the successful efforts of a rival. They all proceeded from the throat of one little wolf, not larger than a spaniel, seated by himself at some distance. He was of the species called the prairie-wolf: a grim-visaged, but harmless little brute, whose worst propensity is creeping among horses and gnawing the ropes of raw hide by which they are picketed around the camp. Other beasts

roam the prairies, far more formidable in aspect and in character. These are the large white and gray wolves, whose deep howl we heard at intervals from far and near.

At last I fell into a doze, and awaking from it, found Deslauriers fast asleep. Scandalized by this breach of discipline, I was about to stimulate his vigilance by stirring him with the stock of my rifle; but, compassion prevailing, I determined to let him sleep awhile, and then arouse him to administer a suitable reproof for such forgetfulness of duty. Now and then I walked the rounds among the silent horses, to see that all was right. The night was chill, damp, and dark, the dank grass bending under the icy dewdrops. At the distance of a rod or two the tents were invisible, and nothing could be seen but the obscure figures of the horses, deeply breathing, and restlessly starting as they slept, or still slowly champing the grass. Far off, beyond the black outline of the prairie, there was a ruddy light, gradually increasing, like the glow of a conflagration; until at length the broad disk of the moon, blood-red, and vastly magnified by the vapors, rose slowly upon the darkness, flecked by one or two little clouds, and as the light poured over the gloomy plain, a fierce and stern howl, close at hand, seemed to greet it as an unwelcome intruder. There was something impressive and awful in the place and the hour; for I and the beasts were all that had consciousness for many a league around.

Some days elapsed, and brought us near the Platte. Two men on horseback approached us one morning, and we watched them with the curiosity and interest that, upon the solitude of the plains, such an encounter always excites. They were evidently whites, from their mode of riding, though, contrary to the usage of that region, neither of them carried a rifle.

"Fools!" remarked Henry Chatillon, "to ride that way on the prairie; Pawnee find them — then they catch it."

Pawnee *had* found them, and they had come very near "catching it;" indeed, nothing saved them but the approach of our party. Shaw and I knew one of them, — a man named Turner, whom we had seen at Westport. He and his companion belonged to an emigrant party encamped a few miles in advance, and had returned to look for some stray oxen, leaving their rifles, with characteristic rashness or ignorance, behind them. Their neglect had nearly cost them dear; for, just before we came up, half-a-dozen Indians approached, and, seeing them apparently defenceless, one of the rascals seized the bridle of Turner's horse and ordered him to dismount. Turner was wholly unarmed; but the other jerked a pistol out of his pocket, at which the Pawnee recoiled; and just then some of our men appearing in the distance, the whole party whipped their rugged little horses and made off. In no way daunted, Turner foolishly persisted in going forward.

Long after leaving him, and late that afternoon, in the midst of a gloomy and barren prairie, we came suddenly upon the great trail of the Pawnees, leading from their villages on the Platte to their war and hunting grounds to the southward. Here every summer passes the motley concourse: thousands of savages, men, women, and children, horses and mules, laden with their weapons and implements, and an innumerable multitude of unruly wolfish dogs, who have not acquired the civilized accomplishment of barking, but howl like their wild cousins of the prairie.

The permanent winter villages of the Pawnees stand on the lower Platte, but throughout the summer the greater part of the inhabitants are wandering over the plains, — a treacherous, cowardly banditti, who, by a thousand acts of pillage and murder, have deserved chastisement at the hands of government. Last year a Dahcotah warrior performed a notable exploit at one of these villages. He approached it alone, in the middle of a dark night, and clambering up the outside of one of the lodges, which are in the form of a half-sphere, looked in at the round hole made at the top for the escape of smoke. The dusky light from the embers showed him the forms of the sleeping inmates; and dropping lightly through the opening, he unsheathed his knife, and, stirring the fire, coolly selected his victims. One by one, he stabbed and scalped them; when a child suddenly awoke and screamed. He rushed from the lodge,

yelled a Sioux war-cry, shouted his name in triumph and defiance, and darted out upon the dark prairie, leaving the whole village behind him in a tumult, with the howling and baying of dogs, the screams of women, and the yells of the enraged warriors.

Our friend Kearsley, as we learned on rejoining him, signalized himself by a less bloody achievement. He and his men were good woodsmen, well skilled in the use of the rifle, but found themselves wholly out of their element on the prairie. None of them had ever seen a buffalo; and they had very vague conceptions of his nature and appearance. On the day after they reached the Platte, looking towards a distant swell, they beheld a multitude of little black specks in motion upon its surface.

"Take your rifles, boys," said Kearsley, "and we 'll have fresh meat for supper." This inducement was quite sufficient. The ten men left their wagons, and set out in hot haste, some on horseback and some on foot, in pursuit of the supposed buffalo. Meanwhile a high, grassy ridge shut the game from view; but mounting it after half an hour's running and riding, they found themselves suddenly confronted by about thirty mounted Pawnees. Amazement and consternation were mutual. Having nothing but their bows and arrows, the Indians thought their hour was come, and the fate that they were conscious of richly deserving about to overtake them. So they began, one and all, to shout forth the most cordial salutations, running up with extreme earnest-

ness to shake hands with the Missourians, who were as much rejoiced as they were to escape the expected conflict.

A low, undulating line of sand-hills bounded the horizon before us. That day we rode ten hours, and it was dusk before we entered the hollows and gorges of these gloomy little hills. At length we gained the summit, and the long-expected valley of the Platte lay before us. We all drew rein, and sat joyfully looking down upon the prospect. It was right welcome; strange, too, and striking to the imagination, and yet it had not one picturesque or beautiful feature; nor had it any of the features of grandeur, other than its vast extent, its solitude, and its wildness. For league after league, a plain as level as a lake was outspread beneath us; here and there the Platte, divided into a dozen thread-like sluices, was traversing it, and an occasional clump of wood, rising in the midst like a shadowy island, relieved the monotony of the waste. No living thing was moving throughout the vast landscape, except the lizards that darted over the sand and through the rank grass and prickly pears at our feet.

We had passed the more tedious part of the journey; but four hundred miles still intervened between us and Fort Laramie; and to reach that point cost us the travel of three more weeks. During the whole of this time we were passing up the middle of a long, narrow, sandy plain, reaching like an outstretched belt nearly to the Rocky Mountains. Two

lines of sand-hills, broken often into the wildest and most fantastic forms, flanked the valley at the distance of a mile or two on the right and left; while beyond them lay a barren, trackless waste, extending for hundreds of miles to the Arkansas on the one side, and the Missouri on the other. Before and behind us, the level monotony of the plain was unbroken as far as the eye could reach. Sometimes it glared in the sun, an expanse of hot, bare sand; sometimes it was veiled by long coarse grass. Skulls and whitening bones of buffalo were scattered everywhere; the ground was tracked by myriads of them, and often covered with the circular indentations where the bulls had wallowed in the hot weather. From every gorge and ravine, opening from the hills, descended deep, well-worn paths, where the buffalo issue twice a day in regular procession to drink in the Platte. The river itself runs through the midst, a thin sheet of rapid, turbid water, half a mile wide, and scarcely two feet deep. Its low banks, for the most part without a bush or a tree, are of loose sand, with which the stream is so charged that it grates on the teeth in drinking. The naked landscape is, of itself, dreary and monotonous enough; and yet the wild beasts and wild men that frequent the valley of the Platte make it a scene of interest and excitement to the traveller. Of those who have journeyed there, scarcely one, perhaps, fails to look back with fond regret to his horse and his rifle.

Early in the morning after we reached the Platte,

a long procession of squalid savages approached our camp. Each was on foot, leading his horse by a rope of bull-hide. His attire consisted merely of a scanty cincture, and an old buffalo robe, tattered and begrimed by use, which hung over his shoulders. His head was close shaven, except a ridge of hair reaching over the crown from the middle of the forehead, very much like the long bristles on the back of a hyena, and he carried his bow and arrows in his hand, while his meagre little horse was laden with dried buffalo meat, the produce of his hunting. Such were the first specimens that we met — and very indifferent ones they were — of the genuine savages of the prairie.

They were the Pawnees whom Kearsley had encountered the day before, and belonged to a large hunting-party, known to be ranging the prairie in the vicinity. They strode rapidly by, within a furlong of our tents, not pausing or looking towards us, after the manner of Indians when meditating mischief, or conscious of ill desert. I went out to meet them, and had an amicable conference with the chief, presenting him with half a pound of tobacco, at which unmerited bounty he expressed much gratification. These fellows, or some of their companions, had committed a dastardly outrage upon an emigrant party in advance of us. Two men, at a distance from the rest, were seized by them, but, lashing their horses, they broke away and fled. At this the Pawnees raised the yell and shot at them, transfixing

the hindmost through the back with several arrows, while his companion galloped away and brought in the news to his party. The panic-stricken emigrants remained for several days in camp, not daring even to send out in quest of the dead body.

Our New-England climate is mild and equable compared with that of the Platte. This very morning, for instance, was close and sultry, the sun rising with a faint oppressive heat; when suddenly darkness gathered in the west, and a furious blast of sleet and hail drove full in our faces, icy cold, and urged with such demoniac vehemence that it felt like a storm of needles. It was curious to see the horses; they faced about in extreme displeasure, holding their tails like whipped dogs, and shivering as the angry gusts, howling louder than a concert of wolves, swept over us. Wright's long train of mules came sweeping round before the storm, like a flight of snow-birds driven by a winter tempest. Thus we all remained stationary for some minutes, crouching close to our horses' necks, much too surly to speak, though once the captain looked up from between the collars of his coat, his face blood-red, and the muscles of his mouth contracted by the cold into a most ludicrous grin of agony. He grumbled something that sounded like a curse, directed, as we believed, against the unhappy hour when he had first thought of leaving home. The thing was too good to last long; and the instant the puffs of wind subsided we pitched our tents, and remained in camp for the rest of a

gloomy and lowering day. The emigrants also encamped near at hand. We being first on the ground, had appropriated all the wood within reach; so that our fire alone blazed cheerily. Around it soon gathered a group of uncouth figures, shivering in the drizzling rain. Conspicuous among them were two or three of the half-savage men who spend their reckless lives in trapping among the Rocky Mountains, or in trading for the Fur Company in the Indian villages. They were all of Canadian extraction; their hard, weather-beaten faces and bushy moustaches looked out from beneath the hoods of their white capotes with a bad and brutish expression, as if their owners might be the willing agents of any villany. And such in fact is the character of many of these men.

On the day following we overtook Kearsley's wagons, and thenceforward, for a week or two, we were fellow-travellers. One good effect, at least, resulted from the alliance; it materially diminished the fatigues of standing guard; for the party being now more numerous, there were longer intervals between each man's turns of duty.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BUFFALO.

FOUR days on the Platte, and yet no buffalo! Last year's signs of them were provokingly abundant; and wood being extremely scarce, we found an admirable substitute in the *bois de vache*, which burns like peat, producing no unpleasant effects. The wagons one morning had left the camp; Shaw and I were already on horseback, but Henry Chatillon still sat cross-legged by the dead embers of the fire, playing pensively with the lock of his rifle, while his sturdy Wyandot pony stood quietly behind him, looking over his head. At last he got up, patted the neck of the pony (which, from an exaggerated appreciation of his merits, he had christened "Five Hundred Dollar"), and then mounted, with a melancholy air.

"What is it, Henry?"

"Ah, I feel lonesome; I never been here before but I see away yonder over the buttes, and down there on the prairie, black — all black with buffalo."

In the afternoon he and I left the party in search of an antelope, until, at the distance of a mile or two on the right, the tall white wagons and the little

black specks of horsemen were just visible, so slowly advancing that they seemed motionless; and far on the left rose the broken line of scorched, desolate sand-hills. The vast plain waved with tall rank grass, that swept our horses' bellies; it swayed to and fro in billows with the light breeze, and far and near antelope and wolves were moving through it, the hairy backs of the latter alternately appearing and disappearing as they bounded awkwardly along; while the antelope, with the simple curiosity peculiar to them, would often approach us closely, their little horns and white throats just visible above the grass-tops, as they gazed eagerly at us with their round black eyes.

I dismounted, and amused myself with firing at the wolves. Henry attentively scrutinized the surrounding landscape; at length he gave a shout, and called on me to mount again, pointing in the direction of the sand-hills. A mile and a half from us two black specks slowly traversed the bare glaring face of one of them, and disappeared behind the summit. "Let us go!" cried Henry, belaboring the sides of "Five Hundred Dollar;" and I following in his wake, we galloped rapidly through the rank grass toward the base of the hills.

From one of their openings descended a deep ravine, widening as it issued on the prairie. We entered it, and galloping up, in a moment were surrounded by the bleak sand-hills. Half of their steep sides were bare; the rest were scantily clothed with

clumps of grass, and various uncouth plants, conspicuous among which appeared the reptile-like prickly-pear. They were gashed with numberless ravines; and as the sky had suddenly darkened, and a cold gusty wind arisen, the strange shrubs and the dreary hills looked doubly wild and desolate. But Henry's face was all eagerness. He tore off a little hair from the piece of buffalo-robe under his saddle, and threw it up, to show the course of the wind. It blew directly before us. The game were therefore to leeward, and it was necessary to make our best speed to get round them.

We scrambled from this ravine, and, galloping away through the hollows, soon found another, winding like a snake among the hills, and so deep that it completely concealed us. We rode up the bottom of it, glancing through the bushes at its edge, till Henry abruptly jerked his rein, and slid out of his saddle. Full a quarter of a mile distant, on the outline of the farthest hill, a long procession of buffalo were walking, in Indian file, with the utmost gravity and deliberation; then more appeared, clambering from a hollow not far off, and ascending, one behind the other, the grassy slope of another hill; then a shaggy head and a pair of short broken horns issued out of a ravine close at hand, and with a slow, stately step, one by one, the enormous brutes came into view, taking their way across the valley, wholly unconscious of an enemy. In a moment Henry was worming his way, lying flat on the ground, through

grass and prickly-pears, towards his unsuspecting victims. He had with him both my rifle and his own. He was soon out of sight, and still the buffalo kept issuing into the valley. For a long time all was silent; I sat holding his horse, and wondering what he was about, when suddenly, in rapid succession, came the sharp reports of the two rifles, and the whole line of buffalo, quickening their pace into a clumsy trot, gradually disappeared over the ridge of the hill. Henry rose to his feet, and stood looking after them.

"You have missed them," said I.

"Yes," said Henry; "let us go." He descended into the ravine, loaded the rifles, and mounted his horse.

We rode up the hill after the buffalo. The herd was out of sight when we reached the top, but lying on the grass, not far off, was one quite lifeless, and another violently struggling in the death-agony.

"You see I miss him!" remarked Henry. He had fired from a distance of more than a hundred and fifty yards, and both balls had passed through the lungs, the true mark in shooting buffalo.

The darkness increased, and a driving storm came on. Tying our horses to the horns of the victims, Henry began the bloody work of dissection, slashing away with the science of a connoisseur, while I vainly tried to imitate him. Old Hendrick recoiled with horror and indignation when I endeavored to tie the meat to the strings of raw hide, always carried for this purpose, dangling at the back of the saddle.

After some difficulty we overcame his scruples; and, heavily burdened with the more eligible portions of the buffalo, we set out on our return. Scarcely had we emerged from the labyrinth of gorges and ravines, and issued upon the open prairie, when the prickling sleet came driving, gust upon gust, directly in our faces. It was strangely dark, though wanting still an hour of sunset. The freezing storm soon penetrated to the skin, but the uneasy trot of our heavy-gaited horses kept us warm enough, as we forced them unwillingly in the teeth of the sleet and rain, by the powerful suasion of our Indian whips. The prairie in this place was hard and level. A flourishing colony of prairie-dogs had burrowed into it in every direction, and the little mounds of fresh earth around their holes were about as numerous as the hills in a cornfield; but not a yelp was to be heard; not the nose of a single citizen was visible; all had retired to the depths of their burrows, and we envied them their dry and comfortable habitations. An hour's hard riding showed us our tent dimly looming through the storm, one side puffed out by the force of the wind, and the other collapsed in proportion, while the disconsolate horses stood shivering close around, and the wind kept up a dismal whistling in the boughs of three old half-dead trees above. Shaw, like a patriarch, sat on his saddle in the entrance, with a pipe in his mouth and his arms folded, contemplating, with cool satisfaction, the piles of meat that we flung on the ground before him. A dark

and dreary night succeeded; but the sun rose, with a heat so sultry and languid that the captain excused himself on that account from waylaying an old buffalo bull, who with stupid gravity was walking over the prairie to drink at the river. So much for the climate of the Platte.

But it was not the weather alone that had produced this sudden abatement of the sportsman-like zeal which the captain had always professed. He had been out on the afternoon before, together with several members of his party; but their hunting was attended with no other result than the loss of one of their best horses, severely injured by Sorel, in vainly chasing a wounded bull. The captain, whose ideas of hard riding were all derived from transatlantic sources, expressed the utmost amazement at the feats of Sorel, who went leaping ravines, and dashing at full speed up and down the sides of precipitous hills, lashing his horse with the recklessness of a Rocky Mountain rider. Unfortunately for the poor animal, he was the property of R——, against whom Sorel entertained an unbounded aversion. The captain himself, it seemed, had also attempted to "run" a buffalo, but though a good and practised horseman, he had soon given over the attempt, being astonished and utterly disgusted at the nature of the ground he was required to ride over.

"Here 's old Papin and Frederic, down from Fort Laramie," shouted Henry, as we returned from a reconnoitring tour on the next morning. We had

for some days expected this encounter. Papin was the *bourgeois*, or "boss," of Fort Laramie. He had come down the river with the buffalo-robes and the beaver, the produce of the last winter's trading. I had among our baggage a letter which I wished to commit to their hands; so requesting Henry to detain the boats if he could until my return, I set out after the wagons. They were about four miles in advance. In half an hour I overtook them, got the letter, trotted back upon the trail, and looking carefully, as I rode, saw a patch of broken storm-blasted trees, and, moving near them, some little black specks like men and horses. Arriving at the place, I found a strange assembly. The boats, eleven in number, deep-laden with the skins, hugged close to the shore, to escape being borne down by the swift current. The rowers, swarthy ignoble Mexicans, turned their brutish faces upwards to look, as I reached the bank. Papin sat in the middle of one of the boats, upon the canvas covering that protected the cargo. He was a stout, robust fellow, with a little gray eye, that had a peculiarly sly twinkle. "Frederic," also, stretched his tall raw-boned proportions close by the *bourgeois*, and "mountain men" completed the group: some lounging in the boats, some strolling on shore; some attired in gayly-painted buffalo robes, like Indian dandies; some with hair saturated with red paint, and plastered with glue to their temples; and one bedaubed with vermilion upon the forehead and each cheek. They were a mongrel race; yet the French

blood seemed to predominate: in a few, indeed, might be seen the black snaky eye of the Indian half-breed, and, one and all, they seemed to aim at assimilating themselves to their red associates.

I shook hands with the *bourgeois*, and delivered the letter; then the boats swung round into the stream and floated away. They had reason for haste, for already the voyage from Fort Laramie had occupied a full month, and the river was growing daily more shallow. Fifty times a day the boats had been aground; indeed, those who navigate the Platte invariably spend half their time upon sand-bars. Two of these boats, the property of private traders, afterwards separating from the rest, got hopelessly involved in the shallows, not very far from the Pawnee villages, and were soon surrounded by a swarm of the inhabitants. They carried off everything that they thought valuable, including most of the robes; and amused themselves by tying up the men left on guard, and soundly whipping them with sticks.

We encamped that night upon the bank of the river. Among the emigrants was an overgrown boy, some eighteen years old, with a head as round and about as large as a pumpkin, and fever-and-ague fits had dyed his face of a corresponding color. He wore an old white hat, tied under his chin with a handkerchief; his body was short and stout, but his legs were of disproportioned and appalling length. I observed him at sunset, breasting the hill with

gigantic strides, and standing against the sky on the summit, like a colossal pair of tongs. In a moment after we heard him screaming frantically behind the ridge, and nothing doubting that he was in the clutches of Indians or grizzly bears, some of the party caught up their rifles and ran to the rescue. His outcries, however, were but an ebullition of joyous excitement; he had chased two wolf pups to their burrow, and was on his knees, grubbing away like a dog at the mouth of the hole, to get at them.

Before morning he caused more serious disquiet in the camp. It was his turn to hold the middle-guard; but no sooner was he called up than he coolly arranged a pair of saddle-bags under a wagon, laid his head upon them, closed his eyes, opened his mouth, and fell asleep. The guard on our side of the camp, thinking it no part of his duty to look after the cattle of the emigrants, contented himself with watching our own horses and mules; the wolves, he said, were unusually noisy; but still no mischief was anticipated until the sun rose, when not a hoof or horn was in sight. The cattle were gone. While Tom was quietly slumbering, the wolves had driven them away.

Then we reaped the fruits of R——'s precious plan of travelling in company with emigrants. To leave them in their distress was not to be thought of, and we felt bound to wait until the cattle could be searched for, and, if possible, recovered. But the reader may be curious to know what punishment

awaited the faithless Tom. By the wholesome law of the prairie, he who falls asleep on guard is condemned to walk all day, leading his horse by the bridle; and we found much fault with our companions for not enforcing such a sentence on the offender. Nevertheless, had he been of our own party, I have no doubt that he would in like manner have escaped scot-free. But the emigrants went farther than mere forbearance: they decreed that since Tom could n't stand guard without falling asleep, he should n't stand guard at all, and henceforward his slumbers were unbroken. Establishing such a premium on drowsiness could have no very beneficial effect upon the vigilance of our sentinels; for it is far from agreeable, after riding from sunrise to sunset, to feel your slumbers interrupted by the butt of a rifle nudging your side, and a sleepy voice growling in your ear that you must get up, to shiver and freeze for three weary hours at midnight.

"Buffalo! buffalo!" It was but a grim old bull, roaming the prairie by himself in misanthropic seclusion; but there might be more behind the hills. Dreading the monotony and languor of the camp, Shaw and I saddled our horses, buckled our holsters in their places, and set out with Henry Chatillon in search of the game. Henry, not intending to take part in the chase, but merely conducting us, carried his rifle with him, while we left ours behind as encumbrances. We rode for some five or six miles, and saw no living thing but wolves, snakes, and prairie-dogs.

"This won't do at all," said Shaw.

"What won't do?"

"There 's no wood about here to make a litter for the wounded man: I have an idea that one of us will need something of the sort before the day is over."

There was some foundation for such an idea, for the ground was none of the best for a race, and grew worse continually as we proceeded; indeed, it soon became desperately bad, consisting of abrupt hills and deep hollows, cut by frequent ravines not easy to pass. At length, a mile in advance, we saw a band of bulls. Some were scattered grazing over a green declivity, while the rest were crowded together in the wide hollow below. Making a circuit, to keep out of sight, we rode towards them, until we ascended a hill, within a furlong of them, beyond which nothing intervened that could possibly screen us from their view. We dismounted behind the ridge, just out of sight, drew our saddle-girths, examined our pistols, and mounting again, rode over the hill, and descended at a canter towards them, bending close to our horses' necks. Instantly they took the alarm: those on the hill descended, those below gathered into a mass, and the whole got into motion, shouldering each other along at a clumsy gallop. We followed, spurring our horses to full speed; and as the herd rushed, crowding and trampling in terror through an opening in the hills, we were close at their heels, half suffocated by the clouds of dust. But as we drew near, their alarm and speed increased; our horses,

being new to the work, showed signs of the utmost fear, bounding violently aside as we approached, and refusing to enter among the herd. The buffalo now broke into several small bodies, scampering over the hills in different directions, and I lost sight of Shaw; neither of us knew where the other had gone. Old Pontiac ran like a frantic elephant up hill and down hill, his ponderous hoofs striking the prairie like sledge-hammers. He showed a curious mixture of eagerness and terror, straining to overtake the panic-stricken herd, but constantly recoiling in dismay as we drew near. The fugitives, indeed, offered no very attractive spectacle, with their shaggy manes and the tattered remnants of their last winter's hair covering their backs in irregular shreds and patches, and flying off in the wind as they ran. At length I urged my horse close behind a bull, and after trying in vain, by blows and spurring, to bring him alongside, I fired from this disadvantageous position. At the report Pontiac swerved so much that I was again thrown a little behind the game. The bullet, entering too much in the rear, failed to disable the bull; for a buffalo requires to be shot at particular points, or he will certainly escape. The herd ran up a hill, and I followed in pursuit. As Pontiac rushed headlong down on the other side, I saw Shaw and Henry descending the hollow on the right, at a leisurely gallop; and in front, the buffalo were just disappearing behind the crest of the next hill, their short tails erect, and their hoofs twinkling through a cloud of dust.

At that moment I heard Shaw and Henry shouting to me; but the muscles of a stronger arm than mine could not have checked at once the furious course of Pontiac, whose mouth was as insensible as leather. Added to this, I rode him that morning with a snaffle, having the day before, for the benefit of my other horse, unbuckled from my bridle the curb which I commonly used. A stronger and hardier brute never trod the prairie; but the novel sight of the buffalo filled him with terror, and when at full speed he was almost incontrollable. Gaining the top of the ridge, I saw nothing of the buffalo; they had all vanished amid the intricacies of the hills and hollows. Reloading my pistols, in the best way I could, I galloped on until I saw them again scuttling along at the base of the hill, their panic somewhat abated. Down went old Pontiac among them, scattering them to the right and left; and then we had another long chase. About a dozen bulls were before us, scouring over the hills, rushing down the declivities with tremendous weight and impetuosity, and then laboring with a weary gallop upward. Still Pontiac, in spite of spurring and beating, would not close with them. One bull at length fell a little behind the rest, and by dint of much effort, I urged my horse within six or eight yards of his side. His back was darkened with sweat: he was panting heavily, while his tongue lolled out a foot from his jaws. Gradually I came up abreast of him, urging Pontiac with leg and rein nearer to his side, when suddenly he did what buffalo

in such circumstances will always do: he slackened his gallop, and turning towards us, with an aspect of mingled rage and distress, lowered his huge, shaggy head for a charge. Pontiac, with a snort, leaped aside in terror, nearly throwing me to the ground, as I was wholly unprepared for such an evolution. I raised my pistol in a passion to strike him on the head, but thinking better of it, fired the bullet after the bull, who had resumed his flight; then drew rein, and determined to rejoin my companions. It was high time. The breath blew hard from Pontiac's nostrils, and the sweat rolled in big drops down his sides; I myself felt as if drenched in warm water. Pledging myself to take my revenge at a future opportunity, I looked about for some indications to show me where I was, and what course I ought to pursue; I might as well have looked for landmarks in the midst of the ocean. How many miles I had run, or in what direction, I had no idea; and around me the prairie was rolling in steep swells and pitches, without a single distinctive feature to guide me. I had a little compass hung at my neck; and, ignorant that the Platte at this point diverged considerably from its easterly course, I thought that by keeping to the northward I should certainly reach it. So I turned and rode about two hours in that direction. The prairie changed as I advanced, softening away into easier undulations, but nothing like the Platte appeared, nor any sign of a human being: the same wild endless expanse lay around me still; and to all

appearance I was as far from my object as ever. I began now to think myself in danger of being lost, and, reining in my horse, summoned the scanty share of woodcraft that I possessed (if that term is applicable upon the prairie) to extricate me. It occurred to me that the buffalo might prove my best guides. I soon found one of the paths made by them in their passage to the river: it ran nearly at right angles to my course; but turning my horse's head in the direction it indicated, his freer gait and erected ears assured me that I was right.

But in the mean time my ride had been by no means a solitary one. The face of the country was dotted far and wide with countless hundreds of buffalo. They trooped along in files and columns, bulls, cows, and calves, on the green faces of the declivities in front. They scrambled away over the hills to the right and left; and far off, the pale blue swells in the extreme distance were dotted with innumerable specks. Sometimes I surprised shaggy old bulls grazing alone, or sleeping behind the ridges I ascended. They would leap up at my approach, stare stupidly at me through their tangled manes, and then gallop heavily away. The antelope were very numerous; and as they are always bold when in the neighborhood of buffalo, they would approach to look at me, gaze intently with their great round eyes, then suddenly leap aside, and stretch lightly away over the prairie, as swiftly as a race-horse. Squalid, ruffian-like wolves sneaked through the hollows and

sandy ravines. Several times I passed through villages of prairie-dogs, who sat, each at the mouth of his burrow, holding his paws before him in a supplicating attitude, and yelping away most vehemently, whisking his little tail with every squeaking cry he uttered. Prairie-dogs are not fastidious in their choice of companions; various long checkered snakes were sunning themselves in the midst of the village, and demure little gray owls, with a large white ring around each eye, were perched side by side with the rightful inhabitants. The prairie teemed with life. Again and again I looked toward the crowded hillsides, and was sure I saw horsemen; and riding near, with a mixture of hope and dread, for Indians were abroad, I found them transformed into a group of buffalo. There was nothing in human shape amid all this vast congregation of brute forms.

When I turned down the buffalo path, the prairie seemed changed; only a wolf or two glided by at intervals, like conscious felons, never looking to the right or left. Being now free from anxiety, I was at leisure to observe minutely the objects around me; and here, for the first time, I noticed insects wholly different from any of the varieties found farther to the eastward. Gaudy butterflies fluttered about my horse's head; strangely formed beetles, glittering with metallic lustre, were crawling upon plants that I had never seen before; multitudes of lizards, too, were darting like lightning over the sand.

I had run to a great distance from the river. It cost me a long ride on the buffalo path, before I saw, from the ridge of a sand-hill, the pale surface of the Platte glistening in the midst of its desert valley, and the faint outline of the hills beyond waving along the sky. From where I stood, not a tree nor a bush nor a living thing was visible throughout the whole extent of the sun-scorched landscape. In half an hour I came upon the trail, not far from the river; and seeing that the party had not yet passed, I turned eastward to meet them, old Pontiac's long swinging trot again assuring me that I was right in doing so. Having been slightly ill on leaving camp in the morning, six or seven hours of rough riding had fatigued me extremely. I soon stopped, therefore, flung my saddle on the ground, and with my head resting on it, and my horse's trail-rope tied loosely to my arm, lay waiting the arrival of the party, speculating meanwhile on the extent of the injuries Pontiac had received. At length the white wagon coverings rose from the verge of the plain. By a singular coincidence, almost at the same moment two horsemen appeared coming down from the hills. They were Shaw and Henry, who had searched for me awhile in the morning, but well knowing the futility of the attempt in such a broken country, had placed themselves on the top of the highest hill they could find, and picketing their horses near them, as a signal to me, had lain down and fallen asleep. The stray cattle had been recovered, as the emigrants told

us, about noon. Before sunset, we pushed forward eight miles farther.

"JUNE 7, 1846. — Four men are missing: R——, Sorel, and two emigrants. They set out this morning after buffalo, and have not yet made their appearance; whether killed or lost, we cannot tell."

I find the above in my note-book, and well remember the council held on the occasion. Our fire was the scene of it; for the superiority of Henry Chatillon's experience and skill made him the resort of the whole camp upon every question of difficulty. He was moulding bullets at the fire, when the captain drew near, with a perturbed and careworn expression of countenance, faithfully reflected on the heavy features of Jack, who followed close behind. Then the emigrants came straggling from their wagons towards the common centre. Various suggestions were made, to account for the absence of the four men, and one or two of the emigrants declared that, when out after the cattle, they had seen Indians dogging them, and crawling like wolves along the ridges of the hills. At this the captain slowly shook his head with double gravity, and solemnly remarked, —

"It 's a serious thing to be travelling through this cursed wilderness;" an opinion in which Jack immediately expressed a thorough coincidence. Henry would not commit himself by declaring any positive opinion.

"Maybe he only followed the buffalo too far; maybe Indian kill him; maybe he got lost; I cannot tell."

With this the auditors were obliged to rest content; the emigrants, not in the least alarmed, though curious to know what had become of their comrades, walked back to their wagons, and the captain betook himself pensively to his tent. Shaw and I followed his example.

CHAPTER VIII.

TAKING FRENCH LEAVE.

On the eighth of June, at eleven o'clock, we reached the South Fork of the Platte, at the usual fording-place. For league upon league the desert uniformity of the prospect was almost unbroken; the hills were dotted with little tufts of shrivelled grass, but betwixt these the white sand was glaring in the sun; and the channel of the river, almost on a level with the plain, was but one great sand-bed, about half a mile wide. It was covered with water, but so scantily that the bottom was scarcely hidden; for, wide as it is, the average depth of the Platte does not at this point exceed a foot and a half. Stopping near its bank, we gathered *bois de vache*, and made a meal of buffalo-meat. Far off, on the other side, was a green meadow, where we could see the white tents and wagons of an emigrant camp; and just opposite to us we could discern a group of men and animals at the water's edge. Four or five horsemen soon entered the river, and in ten minutes had waded across and clambered up the loose sand-bank. They were ill-looking fellows, thin and swarthy, with careworn anxious faces, and lips rigidly compressed.

They had good cause for anxiety; it was three days since they first encamped here, and on the night of their arrival they had lost a hundred and twenty-three of their best cattle, driven off by the wolves, through the neglect of the man on guard. This discouraging and alarming calamity was not the first that had overtaken them. Since leaving the settlements they had met with nothing but misfortune. Some of their party had died; one man had been killed by the Pawnees; and about a week before they had been plundered by the Dahcotahs of all their best horses, the wretched animals on which our visitors were mounted being the only ones that were left. They had encamped, they told us, near sunset, by the side of the Platte, and their oxen were scattered over the meadow, while the horses were feeding a little farther off. Suddenly the ridges of the hills were alive with a swarm of mounted Indians, at least six hundred in number, who came pouring with a yell down towards the camp, rushing up within a few rods, to the great terror of the emigrants; when, suddenly wheeling, they swept around the band of horses, and in five minutes disappeared with their prey through the openings of the hills.

As these emigrants were telling their story, we saw four other men approaching. They proved to be R—— and his companions, who had encountered no mischance of any kind, but had only wandered too far in pursuit of the game. They said they had seen no Indians, but only "millions of buffalo;" and

both R—— and Sorel had meat dangling behind their saddles.

The emigrants recrossed the river, and we prepared to follow. First the heavy ox-wagons plunged down the bank, and dragged slowly over the sand-beds; sometimes the hoofs of the oxen were scarcely wet by the thin sheet of water; and the next moment the river would be boiling against their sides, and eddying around the wheels. Inch by inch they receded from the shore, dwindling every moment, until at length they seemed to be floating far out in the middle of the river. A more critical experiment awaited us; for our little mule-cart was ill fitted for the passage of so swift a stream. We watched it with anxiety, till it seemed a motionless white speck in the midst of the waters; and it was motionless, for it had stuck fast in a quicksand. The mules were losing their footing, the wheels were sinking deeper and deeper, and the water began to rise through the bottom and drench the goods within. All of us who had remained on the hither bank galloped to the rescue; the men jumped into the water, adding their strength to that of the mules, until by much effort the cart was extricated, and conveyed in safety across.

As we gained the other bank, a rough group of men surrounded us. They were not robust, nor large of frame, yet they had an aspect of hardy endurance. Finding at home no scope for their energies, they had betaken themselves to the prairie;

and in them seemed to be revived, with redoubled force, that fierce spirit which impelled their ancestors, scarcely more lawless than themselves, from the German forests, to inundate Europe, and overwhelm the Roman empire. A fortnight afterwards this unfortunate party passed Fort Laramie, while we were there. Not one of their missing oxen had been recovered, though they had remained encamped a week in search of them; and they had been compelled to abandon a great part of their baggage and provisions, and yoke cows and heifers to their wagons to carry them forward upon their journey, the most toilsome and hazardous part of which lay still before them.

It is worth noticing that on the Platte one may sometimes see the shattered wrecks of ancient claw-footed tables, well waxed and rubbed, or massive bureaus of carved oak. These, some of them no doubt the relics of ancestral prosperity in the colonial time, must have encountered strange vicissitudes. Brought, perhaps, originally from England; then, with the declining fortunes of their owners, borne across the Alleghanies to the wilderness of Ohio or Kentucky; then to Illinois or Missouri; and now at last fondly stowed away in the family wagon for the interminable journey to Oregon. But the stern privations of the way are little anticipated. The cherished relic is soon flung out to scorch and crack upon the hot prairie.

We resumed our journey; but we had gone scarcely a mile when R—— called out from the rear, —

"We 'll 'camp here."

"Why do you want to 'camp? Look at the sun. It is not three o'clock yet."

"We 'll 'camp here!"

This was the only reply vouchsafed. Deslauriers was in advance with his cart. Seeing the mule-wagon wheeling from the track, he began to turn his own team in the same direction.

"Go on, Deslauriers;" and the little cart advanced again. As we rode on, we soon heard the wagon of our confederates creaking and jolting behind us, and the driver, Wright, discharging a furious volley of oaths against his mules; no doubt venting upon them the wrath which he dared not direct against a more appropriate object.

Something of this sort had frequently occurred. Our English companion was by no means partial to us, and we thought we discovered in his conduct an intention to thwart and annoy us, especially by retarding the movements of the party, which he knew that we were anxious to quicken. Therefore he would insist on encamping at all unseasonable hours, saying that fifteen miles was a sufficient day's journey. Finding our wishes disregarded, we took the direction of affairs into our own hands. Keeping always in advance, to the inexpressible indignation of R——, we encamped at what time and place we thought proper, not much caring whether the rest chose to follow or not. They always did so, however, pitching their tent near ours, with sullen and wrathful countenances.

Travelling together on these terms did not suit our tastes, and for some time we had meditated a separation. We resolved to leave camp early in the morning, and push forward as rapidly as possible for Fort Laramie, which we hoped to reach, by hard travelling, in four or five days. The captain soon trotted up between us, and we explained our intentions.

"A very extraordinary proceeding, upon my word!" he remarked. The most prominent impression in his mind evidently was that we were deserting his party, in what he regarded as a very dangerous stage of the journey. We ventured to suggest that we were only four in number, while his party still included sixteen men; and as we were to go forward and they were to follow, a full proportion of the perils he apprehended would fall upon us. But the austerity of the captain's features would not relax. "A very extraordinary proceeding, gentlemen!" and repeating this, he rode off to confer with his principal.

Before sunrise on the next morning our tent was down; we harnessed our best horses to the cart and left the camp. But first we shook hands with our friends the emigrants, who sincerely wished us a safe journey, though some others of the party might easily have been consoled had we encountered an Indian war-party on the way. The captain and his brother were standing on the top of a hill, wrapped in their plaids, like spirits of the mist, keeping an anxious eye on the band of horses below. We waved adieu

to them as we rode off the ground. The captain replied with a salutation of the utmost dignity, which Jack tried to imitate, though not with perfect success.

In five minutes we had gained the foot of the hills, but here we came to a stop. Hendrick was in the shafts, and being the incarnation of perverse and brutish obstinacy, he utterly refused to move. Deslauriers lashed and swore till he was tired, but Hendrick stood like a rock, grumbling to himself and looking askance at his enemy, until he saw a favorable opportunity to take his revenge, when he struck out under the shaft with such cool malignity of intention that Deslauriers only escaped the blow by a sudden skip into the air, such as no one but a Frenchman could achieve. Shaw and he then joined forces, and lashed on both sides at once. The brute stood still for a while, till he could bear it no longer, when he began to kick and plunge till he threatened the utter demolition of the cart and harness. We glanced back at the camp, which was in full sight. Our companions, inspired by emulation, were levelling their tents and driving in their cattle and horses.

"Take the horse out," said I.

I took the saddle from Pontiac and put it upon Hendrick; the former was harnessed to the cart in an instant. "*Avance donc!*" cried Deslauriers. Pontiac strode up the hill, twitching the little cart after him as if it were a feather's weight; and though, as we gained the top, we saw the wagons of our deserted

comrades just getting into motion, we had little fear that they could overtake us.

Leaving the trail, we struck directly across the country, and took the shortest cut to reach the main stream of the Platte. A deep ravine suddenly intercepted us. We skirted its sides until we found them less abrupt, and then plunged through in the best way we could. Passing behind the sandy ravines called "Ash Hollow," we stopped for a short nooning at the side of a pool of rain-water; but soon resumed our journey, and some hours before sunset descended the ravines and gorges opening downward upon the Platte west of Ash Hollow. Our horses waded to the fetlock in sand; the sun scorched like fire, and the air swarmed with sand-flies and mosquitoes.

At last we gained the Platte. Following it for about five miles, we saw, just as the sun was sinking, a great meadow, dotted with hundreds of cattle, and beyond them an encampment of emigrants. A party of them came out to meet us, looking upon us at first with cold and suspicious faces. Seeing four men, different in appearance and equipment from themselves, emerging from the hills, they had taken us for the van of the much-dreaded Mormons, whom they were very apprehensive of encountering. We made known our true character, and then they greeted us cordially. They expressed much surprise that so small a party should venture to traverse that region, though in fact such attempts are often made by trappers and Indian traders. We rode with them

to their camp. The wagons, some fifty in number, with here and there a tent intervening, were arranged as usual in a circle; the best horses were picketed in the area within, and the whole circumference was glowing with the dusky light of fires, displaying the forms of the women and children who were crowded around them. This patriarchal scene was curious and striking enough; but we made our escape from the place with all possible despatch, being tormented by the intrusive questioning of the men who thronged about us. Yankee curiosity was nothing to theirs. They demanded our names, whence we came, whither we were going, and what was our business. The last query was particularly embarrassing; since travelling in that country, or indeed anywhere, from any other motive than gain, was an idea of which they took no cognizance. Yet they were fine-looking fellows, with an air of frankness, generosity, and even courtesy, having come from one of the least barbarous of the frontier counties.

We passed about a mile beyond them, and encamped. Being too few in number to stand guard without excessive fatigue, we extinguished our fire, lest it should attract the notice of wandering Indians; and, picketing our horses close around us, slept undisturbed till morning. For three days we travelled without interruption, and on the evening of the third encamped by the well-known spring on Scott's Bluff.

Henry Chatillon and I rode out in the morning, and, descending the western side of the Bluff, were

crossing the plain beyond. Something that seemed to me a file of buffalo came into view, descending the hills several miles before us. But Henry reined in his horse, and, peering across the prairie with a better and more practised eye, soon discovered its real nature. "Indians!" he said. "Old Smoke's lodges, I b'lieve. Come; let us go! Wah! get up, now, 'Five Hundred Dollar.'" And laying on the lash with good will, he galloped forward, and I rode by his side. Not long after, a black speck became visible on the prairie, full two miles off. It grew larger and larger; it assumed the form of a man and horse; and soon we could discern a naked Indian, careering at full gallop towards us. When within a furlong he wheeled his horse in a wide circle, and made him describe various mystic figures upon the prairie; Henry immediately compelled "Five Hundred Dollar" to execute similar evolutions. "It *is* Old Smoke's village," said he, interpreting these signals; "didn't I say so?"

As the Indian approached we stopped to wait for him, when suddenly he vanished, sinking, as it were, into the earth. He had come upon one of the deep ravines that everywhere intersect these prairies. In an instant the rough head of his horse stretched upward from the edge, and the rider and steed came scrambling out, and bounded up to us; a sudden jerk of the rein brought the wild panting horse to a full stop. Then followed the needful formality of shaking hands. I forget our visitor's name. He was

a young fellow, of no note in his nation; yet in his person and equipments he was a good specimen of a Dahcotah warrior in his ordinary travelling dress. Like most of his people, he was nearly six feet high; lithely and gracefully, yet strongly proportioned; and with a skin singularly clear and delicate. He wore no paint; his head was bare; and his long hair was gathered in a clump behind, to the top of which was attached transversely, both by way of ornament and of talisman, the mystic whistle, made of the wing-bone of the war-eagle, and endowed with various magic virtues. From the back of his head descended a line of glittering brass plates, tapering from the size of a doubloon to that of a half-dime, a cumbrous ornament, in high vogue among the Dahcotahs, and for which they pay the traders a most extravagant price; his chest and arms were naked, the buffalo-robe, worn over them when at rest, had fallen about his waist, and was confined there by a belt. This, with the gay moccasons on his feet, completed his attire. For arms he carried a quiver of dog-skin at his back, and a rude but powerful bow in his hand. His horse had no bridle; a cord of hair, lashed around his jaw, served in place of one. The saddle was made of wood covered with raw hide, and both pommel and cantle rose perpendicularly full eighteen inches, so that the warrior was wedged firmly in his seat, whence nothing could dislodge him but the bursting of the girths.

Advancing with our new companion, we found

more of his people, seated in a circle on the top of a hill; while a rude procession came straggling down the neighboring hollow, men, women, and children, with horses dragging the lodge-poles behind them. All that morning, as we moved forward, tall savages were stalking silently about us. At noon we reached Horse Creek. The main body of the Indians had arrived before us. On the farther bank stood a large and strong man, nearly naked, holding a white horse by a long cord, and eying us as we approached. This was the chief, whom Henry called "Old Smoke." Just behind him, his youngest and favorite squaw sat astride a fine mule, covered with caparisons of whitened skins, garnished with blue and white beads, and fringed with little ornaments of metal that tinkled with every movement of the animal. The girl had a light clear complexion, enlivened by a spot of vermilion on each cheek; she smiled, not to say grinned, upon us, showing two gleaming rows of white teeth. In her hand she carried the tall lance of her unchivalrous lord, fluttering with feathers; his round white shield hung at the side of her mule; and his pipe was slung at her back. Her dress was a tunic of deer-skin, made beautifully white by means of a species of clay found on the prairie, ornamented with beads, arranged in figures more gay than tasteful, and with long fringes at all the seams. Not far from the chief stood a group of stately figures, their white buffalo-robes thrown over their shoulders, gazing coldly upon us; and in the rear, for several acres,

the ground was covered with a temporary encampment. Warriors, women, and children swarmed like bees; hundreds of dogs, of all sizes and colors, ran restlessly about; and, close at hand, the wide shallow stream was alive with boys, girls, and young squaws, splashing, screaming, and laughing in the water. At the same time a long train of emigrants with their heavy wagons was crossing the creek, and dragging on in slow procession by the encampment of the people whom they and their descendants, in the space of a century, are to sweep from the face of the earth.

The encampment itself was merely a temporary one during the heat of the day. None of the lodges were pitched; but their heavy leather coverings, and the long poles used to support them, were scattered everywhere, among weapons, domestic utensils, and the rude harness of mules and horses. The squaws of each lazy warrior had made him a shelter from the sun, by stretching a few buffalo-robes, or the corner of a lodge-covering, upon poles; and here he sat in the shade, with a favorite young squaw, perhaps, at his side, glittering with all imaginable trinkets. Before him stood the insignia of his rank as a warrior, his white shield of bull-hide, his medicine-bag, his bow and quiver, his lance and his pipe, raised aloft on a tripod of poles. Except the dogs, the most active and noisy tenants of the camp were the old women, ugly as Macbeth's witches, with hair streaming loose in the wind, and nothing but the

tattered fragment of an old buffalo-robe to hide their shrivelled limbs. The day of their favoritism passed two generations ago; now the heaviest labors of the camp devolved upon them; they must harness the horses, pitch the lodges, dress the buffalo-robes, and bring in meat for the hunters. With the cracked voices of these hags, the clamor of dogs, the shouting and laughing of children and girls, and the listless tranquillity of the warriors, the whole scene had an effect too lively and picturesque to be forgotten.

We stopped not far from the Indian camp, and having invited some of the chiefs and warriors to dinner, placed before them a repast of biscuit and coffee. Squatted in a half-circle on the ground, they soon disposed of it. As we rode forward on the afternoon journey, several of our late guests accompanied us. Among the rest was a bloated savage, of more than three hundred pounds' weight, christened *Le Cochon*, in consideration of his preposterous dimensions, and certain corresponding traits of his character. "The Hog" bestrode a little white pony, scarcely able to bear up under the enormous burden, though, by way of keeping up the necessary stimulus, the rider kept both feet in constant motion, playing alternately against his ribs. The old man was not a chief; he never had ambition enough to become one; he was not a warrior nor a hunter, for he was too fat and lazy; but he was the richest man in the village. Riches among the Dahcotahs consist in horses, and of these "The Hog" had accumulated more than

thirty. He had already ten times as many as he wanted, yet still his appetite for horses was insatiable. Trotting up to me, he shook me by the hand, and gave me to understand that he was my devoted friend; then he began a series of signs and gesticulation, his oily countenance radiant with smiles, and his little eyes peeping out with a cunning twinkle from between the masses of flesh that almost obscured them. Knowing nothing at that time of the sign-language of the Indians, I could only guess at his meaning. So I called on Henry to explain it.

"The Hog," it seems, was anxious to conclude a matrimonial bargain, and barter one of his daughters for my horse. These overtures I chose to reject; at which "The Hog," still laughing with undiminished good humor, gathered his robe about his shoulders, and rode away.

Where we encamped that night, an arm of the Platte ran between high bluffs; it was turbid and swift as heretofore, but trees were growing on its crumbling banks, and there was a nook of grass between the water and the hill. Just before entering this place, we saw the emigrants encamping two or three miles distant on the right; while the whole Indian rabble were pouring down the neighboring hill in hope of the same sort of entertainment which they had experienced from us. In the savage landscape before our camp, nothing but the rushing of the Platte broke the silence. Through the ragged boughs of the trees, dilapidated and half dead, we

saw the sun setting in crimson behind the peaks of the Black Hills; the restless bosom of the river was suffused with red; our white tent was tinged with it, and the sterile bluffs, up to the rocks that crowned them, partook of the same fiery hue. It soon passed away; no light remained but that from our fire, blazing high among the dusky trees and bushes, while we lay around it wrapped in our blankets, smoking and conversing through half the night.

We crossed a sun-scorched plain on the next morning; the line of old cotton-wood trees that fringed the bank of the Platte forming its extreme verge. Nestled close beneath them, we could discern in the distance something like a building. As we came nearer, it assumed form and dimensions, and proved to be a rough structure of logs. It was a little trading fort, belonging to two private traders; and originally intended, like all the forts of the country, to form a hollow square, with rooms for lodging and storage opening upon the area within. Only two sides of it had been completed; the place was now as ill-fitted for the purposes of defence as any of those little log-houses which upon our constantly-shifting frontier have been so often successfully held against overwhelming odds of Indians. Two lodges were pitched close to the fort; the sun beat scorching upon the logs; no living thing was stirring except one old squaw, who thrust her round head from the opening of the nearest lodge, and three or four stout young puppies, who were peeping with looks of eager

inquiry from under the covering. In a moment a door opened, and a little, swarthy, black-eyed Frenchman came out. His dress was rather singular; his black curling hair was parted in the middle of his head, and fell below his shoulders; he wore a tight frock of smoked deer-skin, gayly ornamented with figures worked in dyed porcupine-quills. His moccasons and leggins were also gaudily adorned in the same manner; and the latter had in addition a line of long fringes, reaching down the seams. The small frame of Richard, for by this name Henry made him known to us, was in the highest degree athletic and vigorous. There was no superfluity, and indeed there seldom is among the white men of this country, but every limb was compact and hard; every sinew had its full tone and elasticity, and the whole man wore an air of mingled hardihood and buoyancy.

Richard committed our horses to a Navaho slave, a mean-looking fellow, taken prisoner on the Mexican frontier; and, relieving us of our rifles with ready politeness, led the way into the principal apartment of his establishment. This was a room ten feet square. The walls and floor were of black mud, and the roof of rough timber; there was a huge fireplace made of four flat rocks, picked up on the prairie. An Indian bow and otter-skin quiver, several gaudy articles of Rocky Mountain finery, an Indian medicine-bag, and a pipe and tobacco-pouch, garnished the walls, and rifles rested in a corner. There was no furniture except a sort of rough settle, covered

with buffalo-robes, upon which lolled a tall half-breed with his hair glued in masses upon each temple, and saturated with vermilion. Two or three more "mountain men" sat cross-legged on the floor. Their attire was not unlike that of Richard himself; but the most striking figure of the group was a naked Indian boy of sixteen, with a handsome face, and light, active proportions, who sat in an easy posture in the corner near the door. Not one of his limbs moved the breadth of a hair; his eye was fixed immovably, not on any person present, but, as it appeared, on the projecting corner of the fireplace opposite to him.

On the prairie the custom of smoking with friends is seldom omitted, whether among Indians or whites. The pipe, therefore, was taken from the wall, and its red bowl crammed with the tobacco and *shongsasha*, mixed in suitable proportions. Then it passed round the circle, each man inhaling a few whiffs and handing it to his neighbor. Having spent half an hour here, we took our leave; first inviting our new friends to drink a cup of coffee with us at our camp a mile farther up the river.

By this time we had grown rather shabby; our clothes had burst into rags and tatters; and, what was worse, we had little means of renovation. Fort Laramie was but seven miles before us. Being averse to appearing in such a plight among any society that could boast an approximation to the civilized, we stopped by the river to make our toilet

in the best way we could. We hung up small looking-glasses against the trees and shaved, an operation neglected for six weeks; we performed our ablutions in the Platte, though the utility of such a proceeding was questionable, the water looking exactly like a cup of chocolate, and the banks consisting of the softest and richest yellow mud, so that we were obliged, as a preliminary, to build a causeway of branches and twigs. Having also put on radiant moccasons, procured from a squaw of Richard's establishment, and made what other improvements our narrow circumstances allowed, we took our seats on the grass with a feeling of greatly increased respectability, to await the arrival of our guests. They came; the banquet was concluded, and the pipe smoked. Bidding them adieu, we turned our horses' heads towards the fort.

An hour elapsed. The barren hills closed across our front, and we could see no farther; until, having surmounted them, a rapid stream appeared at the foot of the descent, running into the Platte; beyond was a green meadow, dotted with bushes, and in the midst of these, at the point where the two rivers joined, were the low clay walls of a fort. This was not Fort Laramie, but another post, of less recent date, which having sunk before its successful competitor, was now deserted and ruinous. A moment after, the hills seeming to draw apart as we advanced, disclosed Fort Laramie itself, its high bastions and perpendicular walls of clay crowning an eminence on

the left beyond the stream, while behind stretched a line of arid and desolate ridges, and behind these again, towering seven thousand feet aloft, rose the grim Black Hills.

We tried to ford Laramie Creek at a point nearly opposite the fort, but the stream, swollen with rains, was too rapid. We passed up along its bank to find a better crossing-place. Men gathered on the wall to look at us. "There 's Bordeaux!" called Henry, his face brightening as he recognized his acquaintance; "him there with the spy-glass; and there 's old Vaskiss, and Tucker, and May; and, by George! there 's Simoneau." This Simoneau was Henry's fast friend, and the only man in the country who could rival him in hunting.

We soon found a ford. Henry led the way, the pony approaching the bank with a countenance of cool indifference, bracing his feet and sliding into the stream with the most unmoved composure. We followed; the water boiled against our saddles, but our horses bore us easily through. The unfortunate little mules were near going down with the current, cart and all; and we watched them with some solicitude scrambling over the loose round stones at the bottom, and bracing stoutly against the stream. All landed safely at last; we crossed a little plain, descended a hollow, and, riding up a steep bank, found ourselves before the gateway of Fort Laramie, under the impending blockhouse erected above it to defend the entrance.

CHAPTER IX.

SCENES AT FORT LARAMIE.

LOOKING back, after the expiration of a year, upon Fort Laramie and its inmates, they seem less like a reality than like some fanciful picture of the olden time; so different was the scene from any which this tamer side of the world can present. Tall Indians, enveloped in their white buffalo-robes, were striding across the area or reclining at full length on the low roofs of the buildings which enclosed it. Numerous squaws, gayly bedizened, sat grouped in front of the rooms they occupied; their mongrel offspring, restless and vociferous, rambled in every direction through the fort; and the trappers, traders, and *engagés* of the establishment were busy at their labor or their amusements.

We were met at the gate, but by no means cordially welcomed. Indeed, we seemed objects of some distrust and suspicion, until Henry Chatillon explained that we were not traders, and we, in confirmation, handed to the *bourgeois* a letter of introduction from his principals. He took it, turned it upside down, and tried hard to read it; but his literary attainments not being adequate to the task, he applied for relief

Fort Laramie and its Inmates.

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to the clerk, a sleek, smiling Frenchman, named Monthalon. The letter read, Bordeaux (the *bourgeois*) seemed gradually to awaken to a sense of what was expected of him. Though not deficient in hospitable intentions, he was wholly unaccustomed to act as master of ceremonies. Discarding all formalities of reception, he did not honor us with a single word, but walked swiftly across the area, while we followed in some admiration to a railing and a flight of steps opposite the entrance. He signed to us that we had better fasten our horses to the railing; then he walked up the steps, tramped along a rude balcony, and, kicking open a door, displayed a large room, rather more elaborately furnished than a barn. For furniture it had a rough bedstead, but no bed; two chairs, a chest of drawers, a tin pail to hold water, and a board to cut tobacco upon. A brass crucifix hung on the wall, and close at hand a recent scalp, with hair full a yard long, was suspended from a nail. I shall again have occasion to mention this dismal trophy, its history being connected with that of our subsequent proceedings.

This apartment, the best in Fort Laramie, was that usually occupied by the legitimate *bourgeois*, Papin, in whose absence the command devolved upon Bordeaux. The latter, a stout, bluff little fellow, much inflated by a sense of his new authority, began to roar for buffalo-robes. These being brought and spread upon the floor, formed our beds; much better ones than we had of late been accustomed to. Our

arrangements made, we stepped out to the balcony to take a more leisurely survey of the long-looked-for haven at which we had arrived at last. Beneath us was the square area surrounded by little rooms, or rather cells, which opened upon it. These were devoted to various purposes, but served chiefly for the accommodation of the men employed at the fort, or of the equally numerous squaws whom they were allowed to maintain in it. Opposite to us rose the blockhouse above the gateway; it was adorned with the figure of a horse at full speed, daubed upon the boards with red paint, and exhibiting a degree of skill which might rival that displayed by the Indians in executing similar designs upon their robes and lodges. A busy scene was enacting in the area. The wagons of Vaskiss, an old trader, were about to set out for a remote post in the mountains, and the Canadians were going through their preparations with all possible bustle, while here and there an Indian stood looking on with imperturbable gravity.

Fort Laramie is one of the posts established by the "American Fur Company," which wellnigh monopolizes the Indian trade of this region. Here its officials rule with an absolute sway; the arm of the United States has little force; for when we were there, the extreme outposts of her troops were about seven hundred miles to the eastward. The little fort is built of bricks dried in the sun, and externally is of an oblong form, with bastions of clay, in the form of ordinary blockhouses, at two of the corners. The

walls are about fifteen feet high, and surmounted by a slender palisade. The roofs of the apartments within, which are built close against the walls, serve the purpose of a banquette. Within, the fort is divided by a partition: on one side is the square area, surrounded by the store-rooms, offices, and apartments of the inmates; on the other is the *corral*, a narrow place, encompassed by the high clay walls, where at night, or in presence of dangerous Indians, the horses and mules of the fort are crowded for safe keeping. The main entrance has two gates, with an arched passage intervening. A little square window, high above the ground, opens laterally from an adjoining chamber into this passage; so that when the inner gate is closed and barred, a person without may still hold communication with those within, through this narrow aperture. This obviates the necessity of admitting suspicious Indians, for purposes of trading, into the body of the fort; for when danger is apprehended, the inner gate is shut fast, and all traffic is carried on by means of the window. This precaution, though necessary at some of the company's posts, is seldom resorted to at Fort Laramie; where, though men are frequently killed in the neighborhood, no apprehensions are felt of any general designs of hostility from the Indians.

We did not long enjoy our new quarters undisturbed. The door was silently pushed open, and two eyeballs and a visage as black as night looked in upon us; then a red arm and shoulder intruded

themselves, and a tall Indian, gliding in, shook us by the hand, grunted his salutation, and sat down on the floor. Others followed, with faces of the natural hue, and letting fall their heavy robes from their shoulders, took their seats, quite at ease, in a semi-circle before us. The pipe was now to be lighted and passed from one to another; and this was the only entertainment that at present they expected from us. These visitors were fathers, brothers, or other relatives of the squaws in the fort, where they were permitted to remain, loitering about in perfect idleness. All those who smoked with us were men of standing and repute. Two or three others dropped in also; young fellows who neither by their years nor their exploits were entitled to rank with the old men and warriors, and who, abashed in the presence of their superiors, stood aloof, never withdrawing their eyes from us. Their cheeks were adorned with vermilion, their ears with pendants of shell, and their necks with beads. Never yet having signalized themselves as hunters, or performed the honorable exploit of killing a man, they were held in slight esteem, and were diffident and bashful in proportion. Certain formidable inconveniences attended this influx of visitors. They were bent on inspecting everything in the room; our equipments and our dress alike underwent their scrutiny; for though the contrary has been asserted, few beings have more curiosity than Indians in regard to subjects within their ordinary range of thought. As to other matters, indeed,

"War parties of the Crow Indians have thrown the bodies from the scaffolds."

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they seem utterly indifferent. They will not trouble themselves to inquire into what they cannot comprehend, but are quite contented to place their hands over their mouths in token of wonder, and exclaim that it is "great medicine." With this comprehensive solution, an Indian never is at a loss. He never launches into speculation and conjecture; his reason moves in its beaten track. His soul is dormant; and no exertions of the missionaries, Jesuit or Puritan, of the old world or of the new, have as yet availed to arouse it.

As we were looking, at sunset, from the wall, upon the desolate plains that surround the fort, we observed a cluster of strange objects, like scaffolds, rising in the distance against the red western sky. They bore aloft some singular-looking burdens; and at their foot glimmered something white, like bones. This was the place of sepulture of some Dahcotah chiefs, whose remains their people are fond of placing in the vicinity of the fort, in the hope that they may thus be protected from violation at the hands of their enemies. Yet it has happened more than once, and quite recently, that war-parties of the Crow Indians, ranging through the country, have thrown the bodies from the scaffolds, and broken them to pieces, amid the yells of the Dahcotah, who remained pent up in the fort, too few to defend the honored relics from insult. The white objects upon the ground were buffalo skulls, arranged in the mystic circle commonly seen at Indian places of sepulture upon the prairie.

We soon discovered, in the twilight, a band of fifty or sixty horses approaching the fort. These were the animals belonging to the establishment; who, having been sent out to feed, under the care of armed guards, in the meadows below, were now being driven into the *corral* for the night. A gate opened into this enclosure: by the side of it stood one of the guards, an old Canadian, with gray bushy eyebrows, and a dragoon-pistol stuck into his belt; while his comrade, mounted on horseback, his rifle laid across the saddle in front, and his long hair blowing before his swarthy face, rode at the rear of the disorderly troop, urging them up the ascent. In a moment the narrow *corral* was thronged with the half-wild horses, kicking, biting, and crowding restlessly together.

The discordant jingling of a bell, rung by a Canadian in the area, summoned us to supper. The repast was served on a rough table in one of the lower apartments of the fort, and consisted of cakes of bread and dried buffalo-meat, — an excellent thing for strengthening the teeth. At this meal were seated the *bourgeois* and superior dignitaries of the establishment, among whom Henry Chatillon was worthily included. No sooner was it finished, than the table was spread a second time (the luxury of bread being now, however, omitted), for the benefit of certain hunters and trappers of an inferior standing; while the ordinary Canadian *engagés* were regaled on dried meat in one of their lodging-rooms. By way of illustrating the domestic economy of Fort Laramie,

it may not be amiss to introduce in this place a story current among the men when we were there.

There was an old man named Pierre, whose duty it was to bring the meat from the store-room for the men. Old Pierre, in the kindness of his heart, used to select the fattest and the best pieces for his companions. This did not long escape the keen-eyed *bourgeois*, who was greatly disturbed at such improvidence, and cast about for some means to stop it. At last he hit on a plan that exactly suited him. At the side of the meat-room, and separated from it by a clay partition, was another apartment, used for the storage of furs. It had no communication with the fort, except through a square hole in the partition; and of course it was perfectly dark. One evening the *bourgeois*, watching for a moment when no one observed him, dodged into the meat-room, clambered through the hole, and ensconced himself among the furs and buffalo-robes. Soon after, old Pierre came in with his lantern, and, muttering to himself, began to pull over the bales of meat, and select the best pieces, as usual. But suddenly a hollow and sepulchral voice proceeded from the inner room: "Pierre, Pierre! Let that fat meat alone. Take nothing but lean." Pierre dropped his lantern, and bolted out into the fort, screaming, in an agony of terror, that the devil was in the store-room; but tripping on the threshold, he pitched over upon the gravel, and lay senseless, stunned by the fall. The Canadians ran out to the rescue. Some lifted the unlucky Pierre;

and others, making an extempore crucifix of two sticks, were proceeding to attack the devil in his stronghold, when the *bourgeois*, with a crestfallen countenance, appeared at the door. To add to his mortification, he was obliged to explain the whole stratagem to Pierre, in order to bring him to his senses.

We were sitting, on the following morning, in the passage-way between the gates, conversing with the traders Vaskiss and May. These two men, together with our sleek friend, the clerk Monthalon, were, I believe, the only persons then in the fort who could read and write. May was telling a curious story about the traveller Catlin, when an ugly, diminutive Indian, wretchedly mounted, came up at a gallop, and rode by us into the fort. On being questioned, he said that Smoke's village was close at hand. Accordingly only a few minutes elapsed before the hills beyond the river were covered with a disorderly swarm of savages, on horseback and on foot. May finished his story; and by that time the whole array had descended to Laramie Creek, and begun to cross it in a mass. I walked down to the bank. The stream is wide, and was then between three and four feet deep, with a very swift current. For several rods the water was alive with dogs, horses, and Indians. The long poles used in pitching the lodges are carried by the horses, fastened by the heavier end, two or three on each side, to a rude sort of pack-saddle, while the other end drags on the ground.

About a foot behind the horse, a kind of large basket or pannier is suspended between the poles, and firmly lashed in its place. On the back of the horse are piled various articles of luggage; the basket also is well filled with domestic utensils, or, quite as often, with a litter of puppies, a brood of small children, or a superannuated old man. Numbers of these curious vehicles, *traineaux*, or, as the Canadians called them, *travaux*, were now splashing together through the stream. Among them swam countless dogs, often burdened with miniature *traineaux;* and dashing forward on horseback through the throng came the warriors, the slender figure of some lynx-eyed boy clinging fast behind them. The women sat perched on the pack-saddles, adding not a little to the load of the already overburdened horses. The confusion was prodigious. The dogs yelled and howled in chorus; the puppies in the *traineaux* set up a dismal whine, as the water invaded their comfortable retreat; the little black-eyed children, from one year of age upward, clung fast with both hands to the edge of their basket, and looked over in alarm at the water rushing so near them, sputtering and making wry mouths as it splashed against their faces. Some of the dogs, encumbered by their load, were carried down by the current, yelping piteously; and the old squaws would rush into the water, seize their favorites by the neck, and drag them out. As each horse gained the bank, he scrambled up as he could. Stray horses and colts came among the rest, often breaking away at full

speed through the crowd, followed by the old hags, screaming after their fashion on all occasions of excitement. Buxom young squaws, blooming in all the charms of vermilion, stood here and there on the bank, holding aloft their master's lance, as a signal to collect the scattered portions of his household. In a few moments the crowd melted away; each family, with its horses and equipage, filing off to the plain at the rear of the fort; and here, in the space of half an hour, arose sixty or seventy of their tapering lodges. Their horses were feeding by hundreds over the surrounding prairie, and their dogs were roaming everywhere. The fort was full of warriors, and the children were whooping and yelling incessantly under the walls.

These new-comers were scarcely arrived, when Bordeaux ran across the fort, shouting to his squaw to bring him his spy-glass. The obedient Marie, the very model of a squaw, produced the instrument, and Bordeaux hurried with it to the wall. Pointing it eastward, he exclaimed, with an oath, that the families were coming. But a few moments elapsed before the heavy caravan of the emigrant wagons could be seen, steadily advancing from the hills. They gained the river, and, without turning or pausing, plunged in, passed through, and slowly ascending the opposing bank, kept directly on their way by the fort and the Indian village, until, gaining a spot a quarter of a mile distant, they wheeled into a circle. For some time our tranquillity was undis-

turbed. The emigrants were preparing their encampment; but no sooner was this accomplished, than Fort Laramie was taken by storm. A crowd of broad-brimmed hats, thin visages, and staring eyes, appeared suddenly at the gate. Tall, awkward men, in brown homespun; women, with cadaverous faces and long lank figures, came thronging in together, and, as if inspired by the very demon of curiosity, ransacked every nook and corner of the fort. Dismayed at this invasion, we withdrew in all speed to our chamber, vainly hoping that it might prove a sanctuary. The emigrants prosecuted their investigations with untiring vigor. They penetrated the rooms, or rather dens, inhabited by the astonished squaws. Resolved to search every mystery to the bottom, they explored the apartments of the men, and even that of Marie and the *bourgeois*. At last a numerous deputation appeared at our door, but found no encouragement to remain.

Having at length satisfied their curiosity, they next proceeded to business. The men occupied themselves in procuring supplies for their onward journey; either buying them, or giving in exchange superfluous articles of their own.

The emigrants felt a violent prejudice against the French Indians, as they called the trappers and traders. They thought, and with some reason, that these men bore them no goodwill. Many of them were firmly persuaded that the French were instigating the Indians to attack and cut them off. On visiting

the encampment we were at once struck with the extraordinary perplexity and indecision that prevailed among them. They seemed like men totally out of their element; bewildered and amazed, like a troop of schoolboys lost in the woods. It was impossible to be long among them without being conscious of the bold spirit with which most of them were animated. But the *forest* is the home of the backwoodsman. On the remote prairie he is totally at a loss. He differs as much from the genuine "mountain-man" as a Canadian *voyageur*, paddling his canoe on the rapids of the Ottawa, differs from an American sailor among the storms of Cape Horn. Still my companion and I were somewhat at a loss to account for this perturbed state of mind. It could not be cowardice: these men were of the same stock with the volunteers of Monterey and Buena Vista. Yet, for the most part, they were the rudest and most ignorant of the frontier population; they knew absolutely nothing of the country and its inhabitants; they had already experienced much misfortune, and apprehended more; they had seen nothing of mankind, and had never put their own resources to the test.

A full share of suspicion fell upon us. Being strangers, we were looked upon as enemies. Having occasion for a supply of lead and a few other necessary articles, we used to go over to the emigrant camps to obtain them. After some hesitation, some dubious glances, and fumbling of the hands in the

pockets, the terms would be agreed upon, the price tendered, and the emigrant would go off to bring the article in question. After waiting until our patience gave out, we would go in search of him, and find him seated on the tongue of his wagon.

"Well, stranger," he would observe, as he saw us approach, "I reckon I won't trade."

Some friend of his had followed him from the scene of the bargain, and whispered in his ear that clearly we meant to cheat him, and he had better have nothing to do with us.

This timorous mood of the emigrants was doubly unfortunate, as it exposed them to real danger. Assume, in the presence of Indians, a bold bearing, self-confident yet vigilant, and you will find them tolerably safe neighbors. But your safety depends on the respect and fear you are able to inspire. If you betray timidity or indecision, you convert them from that moment into insidious and dangerous enemies. The Dahcotah saw clearly enough the perturbation of the emigrants, and instantly availed themselves of it. They became extremely insolent and exacting in their demands. It has become an established custom with them to go to the camp of every party, as it arrives in succession at the fort, and demand a feast. Smoke's village had come with this express design, having made several days' journey with no other object than that of enjoying a cup of coffee and two or three biscuit. So the "feast" was demanded, and the emigrants dared not refuse it.

One evening, about sunset, the village was deserted. We met old men, warriors, squaws, and children in gay attire, trooping off to the encampment, with faces of anticipation; and, arriving here, they seated themselves in a semicircle. Smoke occupied the centre, with his warriors on either hand; the young men and boys came next, and the squaws and children formed the horns of the crescent. The biscuit and coffee were promptly despatched, the emigrants staring open-mouthed at their savage guests. With each emigrant party that arrived at Fort Laramie this scene was renewed; and every day the Indians grew more rapacious and presumptuous. One evening they broke in pieces, out of mere wantonness, the cups from which they had been feasted; and this so exasperated the emigrants that many of them seized their rifles and could scarcely be restrained from firing on the insolent mob of Indians. Before we left the country this dangerous spirit on the part of the Dahcotah had mounted to a yet higher pitch. They began openly to threaten the emigrants with destruction, and actually fired upon one or two parties of them. A military force and military law are urgently called for in that perilous region; and unless troops are speedily stationed at Fort Laramie, or elsewhere in the neighborhood, both emigrants and other travellers will be exposed to most imminent risks.

The Ogillallah, the Brulé, and the other western bands of the Dahcotah or Sioux, are thorough sav-

ages, unchanged by any contact with civilization. Not one of them can speak a European tongue, or has ever visited an American settlement. Until within a year or two, when the emigrants began to pass through their country on the way to Oregon, they had seen no whites, except the few employed about the Fur Company's posts. They thought them a wise people, inferior only to themselves, living in leather lodges, like their own, and subsisting on buffalo. But when the swarm of *Meneaska*, with their oxen and wagons, began to invade them, their astonishment was unbounded. They could scarcely believe that the earth contained such a multitude of white men. Their wonder is now giving way to indignation; and the result, unless vigilantly guarded against, may be lamentable in the extreme.

But to glance at the interior of a lodge. Shaw and I used often to visit them. Indeed, we spent most of our evenings in the Indian village, Shaw's assumption of the medical character giving us a fair pretext. As a sample of the rest I will describe one of these visits. The sun had just set, and the horses were driven into the *corral*. The Prairie Cock, a noted beau, came in at the gate with a bevy of young girls, with whom he began a dance in the area, leading them round and round in a circle, while he jerked up from his chest a succession of monotonous sounds, to which they kept time in a rueful chant. Outside the gate boys and young men were idly frolicking; and close by, looking grimly upon them, stood a

warrior in his robe, with his face painted jet-black, is taken that he had lately taken a Pawnee scalp. Passing these, the tall dark lodges rose between us and the red western sky. We repaired at once to the lodge of Old Smoke himself. It was by no means better than the others; indeed, it was rather shabby; for in this democratic community the chief never assumes superior state. Smoke sat cross-legged on a buffalo-robe, and his grunt of salutation as we entered was unusually cordial, out of respect no doubt to Shaw's medical character. Seated around the lodge were several squaws, and an abundance of children. The complaint of Shaw's patients was, for the most part, a severe inflammation of the eyes, occasioned by exposure to the sun, a species of disorder which he treated with some success. He had brought with him a homœopathic medicine-chest, and was, I presume, the first who introduced that harmless system of treatment among the Ogillallah. No sooner had a robe been spread at the head of the lodge for our accommodation, and we had seated ourselves upon it, than a patient made her appearance: the chief's daughter herself, who, to do her justice, was the best-looking girl in the village. Being on excellent terms with the physician, she placed herself readily under his hands, and submitted with a good grace to his applications, laughing in his face during the whole process, for a squaw hardly knows how to smile. This case despatched, another of a different kind succeeded. A hideous, emaciated

old woman sat in the darkest corner of the lodge, rocking to and fro with pain, and hiding her eyes from the light by pressing the palms of both hands against her face. At Smoke's command she came forward, very unwillingly, and exhibited a pair of eyes that had nearly disappeared from excess of inflammation. No sooner had the doctor fastened his grip upon her, than she set up a dismal moaning, and writhed so in his grasp that he lost all patience; but being resolved to carry his point, he succeeded at last in applying his favorite remedies.

"It is strange," he said, when the operation was finished, "that I forgot to bring any Spanish flies with me; we must have something here to answer for a counter-irritant."

So, in the absence of better, he seized upon a red-hot brand from the fire, and clapped it against the temple of the old squaw, who set up an unearthly howl, at which the rest of the family broke into a laugh.

During these medical operations Smoke's eldest squaw entered the lodge, with a mallet in her hand, the stone head of which, precisely like those sometimes ploughed up in the fields of New England, was made fast to the handle by a covering of raw hide. I had observed some time before a litter of well-grown black puppies, comfortably nestled among some buffalo-robes at one side; but this new-comer speedily disturbed their enjoyment; for seizing one of them by the hind paw, she dragged him out, and

carrying him to the entrance of the lodge, hammered him on the head till she killed him. Conscious to what this preparation tended, I looked through a hole in the back of the lodge to see the next steps of the process. The squaw, holding the puppy by the legs, was swinging him to and fro through the blaze of a fire, until the hair was singed off. This done, she unsheathed her knife and cut him into small pieces, which she dropped into a kettle to boil. In a few moments a large wooden dish was set before us, filled with this delicate preparation. A dog-feast is the greatest compliment a Dahcotah can offer to his guest; and, knowing that to refuse eating would be an affront, we attacked the little dog, and devoured him before the eyes of his unconscious parent. Smoke in the mean time was preparing his great pipe. It was lighted when we had finished our repast, and we passed it from one to another till the bowl was empty. This done, we took our leave without farther ceremony, knocked at the gate of the fort, and, after making ourselves known, were admitted.

CHAPTER X.

THE WAR-PARTIES.

THE summer of 1846 was a season of warlike excitement among all the western bands of the Dahcotah. In 1845 they encountered great reverses. Many war-parties had been sent out; some of them had been cut off, and others had returned broken and disheartened; so that the whole nation was in mourning. Among the rest, ten warriors had gone to the Snake country, led by the son of a prominent Ogillallah chief, called The Whirlwind. In passing over Laramie Plains they encountered a superior number of their enemies, were surrounded, and killed to a man. Having performed this exploit, the Snakes became alarmed, dreading the resentment of the Dahcotah; and they hastened therefore to signify their wish for peace by sending the scalp of the slain partisan, with a small parcel of tobacco attached, to his tribesmen and relations. They had employed old Vaskiss, the trader, as their messenger, and the scalp was the same that hung in our room at the fort. But The Whirlwind proved inexorable. Though his character hardly corresponds with his name, he is nevertheless an Indian, and hates the Snakes with

his whole soul. Long before the scalp arrived, he had made his preparations for revenge. He sent messengers with presents and tobacco to all the Dahcotah within three hundred miles, proposing a grand combination to chastise the Snakes, and naming a place and time of rendezvous. The plan was readily adopted, and at this moment many villages, probably embracing in the whole five or six thousand souls, were slowly creeping over the prairies and tending towards the common centre at "La Bonté's camp," on the Platte. Here their warlike rites were to be celebrated with more than ordinary solemnity, and a thousand warriors, as it was said, were to set out for the enemy's country. The characteristic result of this preparation will appear in the sequel.

I was greatly rejoiced to hear of it. I had come into the country chiefly with a view of observing the Indian character. To accomplish my purpose it was necessary to live in the midst of them, and become, as it were, one of them. I proposed to join a village, and make myself an inmate of one of their lodges; and henceforward this narrative, so far as I am concerned, will be chiefly a record of the progress of this design, and the unexpected impediments that opposed it.

We resolved on no account to miss the rendezvous at "La Bonté's camp." Our plan was to leave Deslauriers at the fort, in charge of our equipage and the better part of our horses, while we took with us nothing but our weapons and the worst animals we

had. In all probability, jealousies and quarrels would arise among so many hordes of fierce impulsive savages, congregated together under no common head, and many of them strangers from remote prairies and mountains. We were bound in common prudence to be cautious how we excited any feeling of cupidity. This was our plan; but unhappily we were not destined to visit "La Bonté's camp" in this manner, for one morning a young Indian came to the fort and brought us evil tidings. The new-comer was an arrant dandy. His ugly face was painted with vermilion; on his head fluttered the tail of a prairie-cock (a large species of pheasant, not found, as I have heard, eastward of the Rocky Mountains); in his ears were hung pendants of shell, and a flaming red blanket was wrapped around him. He carried a dragoon-sword in his hand, solely for display, since the knife, the arrow, and the rifle are the arbiters of every prairie fight; but as no one in this country goes abroad unarmed, the dandy carried a bow and arrows in an otter-skin quiver at his back. In this guise, and bestriding his yellow horse with an air of extreme dignity, "The Horse," for that was his name, rode in at the gate, turning neither to the right nor the left, but casting glances askance at the groups of squaws who, with their mongrel progeny, were sitting in the sun before their doors. The evil tidings brought by "The Horse" were of the following import: The squaw of Henry Chatillon, a woman with whom he had been connected for years by the

strongest ties which in that country exist between the sexes, was dangerously ill. She and her children were in the village of The Whirlwind, at the distance of a few days' journey. Henry was anxious to see the woman before she died, and provide for the safety and support of his children, of whom he was extremely fond. To have refused him this would have been inhumanity. We abandoned our plan of joining Smoke's village and proceeding with it to the rendezvous, and determined to meet The Whirlwind, and go in his company.

I had been slightly ill for several weeks, but on the third night after reaching Fort Laramie a violent pain awoke me, and I found myself attacked by the same disorder that occasioned such heavy losses to the army on the Rio Grande. In a day and a half I was reduced to extreme weakness, so that I could not walk without pain and effort. Having no medical adviser, nor any choice of diet, I resolved to throw myself upon Providence for recovery, using, without regard to the disorder, any portion of strength that might remain to me. So on the twentieth of June we set out from Fort Laramie to meet The Whirlwind's village. Though aided by the high-bowed "mountain-saddle," I could scarcely keep my seat on horseback. Before we left the fort we hired another man, a long-haired Canadian, named Raymond, with a face like an owl's, contrasting oddly enough with Deslauriers's mercurial countenance. This was not the only reinforcement to our

party. A vagrant Indian trader, named Reynal, joined us, together with his squaw, Margot, and her two nephews, our dandy friend, "The Horse," and his younger brother, "The Hail-Storm." Thus accompanied, we betook ourselves to the prairie, leaving the beaten trail, and passing over the desolate hills that flank the valley of Laramie Creek. In all, Indians and whites, we counted eight men and one woman.

Reynal, the trader, the image of sleek and selfish complacency, carried "The Horse's" dragoon-sword in his hand, delighting apparently in this useless parade; for, from spending half his life among Indians, he had caught not only their habits but their ideas. Margot, a female animal of more than two hundred pounds' weight, was couched in the basket of a *traineau*, such as I have before described; besides her ponderous bulk, various domestic utensils were attached to the vehicle, and she led by a trail-rope a pack-horse, which carried the covering of Reynal's lodge. Deslauriers walked briskly by the side of the cart, and Raymond came behind, swearing at the spare horses which it was his business to drive. The restless young Indians, their quivers at their backs and their bows in their hands, galloped over the hills, often starting a wolf or an antelope from the thick growth of wild-sage bushes. Shaw and I were in keeping with the rest of the rude cavalcade, having in the failure of other clothing adopted the buckskin attire of the trappers. Henry Chatillon

rode in advance of the whole. Thus we passed hill after hill and hollow after hollow, a country arid, broken, and so parched by the sun that none of the plants familiar to our more favored soil would flourish upon it, though there were multitudes of strange medicinal herbs, more especially the absinth, which covered every declivity, while cacti were hanging like reptiles at the edges of every ravine. At length we ascended a high hill, our horses treading upon pebbles of flint, agate, and rough jasper, until, gaining the top, we looked down on the wild bottoms of Laramie Creek, which far below us wound like a writhing snake from side to side of the narrow interval, amid a growth of shattered cotton-wood and ash-trees. Lines of tall cliffs, white as chalk, shut in this green strip of woods and meadow-land, into which we descended and encamped for the night. In the morning we passed a wide grassy plain by the river; there was a grove in front, and beneath its shadows the ruins of an old trading fort of logs. The grove bloomed with myriads of wild roses, with their sweet perfume fraught with recollections of home. As we emerged from the trees, a rattlesnake, as large as a man's arm, and more than four feet long, lay coiled on a rock, fiercely rattling and hissing at us; a gray hare, twice as large as those of New England, leaped up from the tall ferns; curlew flew screaming over our heads, and a host of little prairie-dogs sat yelping at us at the mouths of their burrows on the dry plain beyond. Suddenly an antelope

leaped up from the wild-sage bushes, gazed eagerly at us, and then, erecting his white tail, stretched away like a greyhound. The two Indian boys found a white wolf, as large as a calf, in a hollow, and, giving a sharp yell, they galloped after him; but the wolf leaped into the stream and swam across. Then came the crack of a rifle, the bullet whistling harmlessly over his head, as he scrambled up the steep declivity, rattling down stones and earth into the water below. Advancing a little, we beheld, on the farther bank of the stream, a spectacle not common even in that region; for, emerging from among the trees, a herd of some two hundred elk came out upon the meadow, their antlers clattering as they walked forward in a dense throng. Seeing us, they broke into a run, rushing across the opening and disappearing among the trees and scattered groves. On our left was a barren prairie, stretching to the horizon; on our right, a deep gulf, with Laramie Creek at the bottom. We found ourselves at length at the edge of a steep descent; a narrow valley, with long rank grass and scattered trees stretching before us for a mile or more along the course of the stream. Reaching the farther end, we stopped and encamped. A huge old cotton-wood tree spread its branches horizontally over our tent. Laramie Creek, circling before our camp, half enclosed us; it swept along the bottom of a line of tall white cliffs that looked down on us from the farther bank. There were dense copses on our right; the cliffs, too, were half hidden

by bushes, though behind us a few cotton-wood trees, dotting the green prairie, alone impeded the view, and friend or enemy could be discerned in that direction at a mile's distance. Here we resolved to remain and await the arrival of The Whirlwind, who would certainly pass this way in his progress towards La Bonté's camp. To go in search of him was not expedient, both on account of the broken and impracticable nature of the country, and the uncertainty of his position and movements; besides, our horses were almost worn out, and I was in no condition to travel. We had good grass, good water, tolerable fish from the stream, and plenty of small game, such as antelope and deer, though no buffalo. There was one little drawback to our satisfaction: a certain extensive tract of bushes and dried grass, just behind us, which it was by no means advisable to enter, since it sheltered a numerous brood of rattlesnakes. Henry Chatillon again despatched "The Horse" to the village, with a message to his squaw that she and her relatives should leave the rest and push on as rapidly as possible to our camp.

Our daily routine soon became as regular as that of a well-ordered household. The weather-beaten old tree was in the centre; our rifles generally rested against its vast trunk, and our saddles were flung on the ground around it; its distorted roots were so twisted as to form one or two convenient armchairs, where we could sit in the shade and read or smoke; but meal-times became, on the whole, the most inter-

esting hours of the day, and a bountiful provision was made for them. An antelope or a deer usually swung from a bough, and haunches were suspended against the trunk. That camp is daguerreotyped on my memory: the old tree, the white tent, with Shaw sleeping in the shadow of it, and Reynal's miserable lodge close by the bank of the stream. It was a wretched oven-shaped structure, made of begrimed and tattered buffalo-hides stretched over a frame of poles; one side was open, and at the side of the opening hung the powder-horn and bullet-pouch of the owner, together with his long red pipe, and a rich quiver of otter-skin, with a bow and arrows; for Reynal, an Indian in most things but color, chose to hunt buffalo with these primitive weapons. In the darkness of this cavern-like habitation might be discerned Madame Margot, her overgrown bulk stowed away among her domestic implements, furs, robes, blankets, and painted cases of raw hide, in which dried meat is kept. Here she sat from sunrise to sunset, an impersonation of gluttony and laziness, while her affectionate proprietor was smoking, or begging petty gifts from us, or telling lies concerning his own achievements, or perchance engaged in the more profitable occupation of cooking some preparation of prairie delicacies. Reynal was an adept at this work; he and Deslauriers have joined forces, and are hard at work together over the fire, while Raymond spreads, by way of table-cloth, a buffalo-hide carefully whitened with pipe-clay, on the grass

before the tent. Here he arranges the teacups and plates; and then, creeping on all fours, like a dog, thrusts his head in at the opening of the tent. For a moment we see his round owlish eyes rolling wildly, as if the idea he came to communicate had suddenly escaped him; then collecting his scattered thoughts, as if by an effort, he informs us that supper is ready, and instantly withdraws.

When sunset came, and at that hour the wild and desolate scene would assume a new aspect, the horses were driven in. They had been grazing all day in the neighboring meadow, but now they were picketed close about the camp. As the prairie darkened we sat and conversed around the fire, until, becoming drowsy, we spread our saddles on the ground, wrapped our blankets around us, and lay down. We never placed a guard, having by this time become too indolent; but Henry Chatillon folded his loaded rifle in the same blanket with himself, observing that he always took it to bed with him when he 'camped in that place. Henry was too bold a man to use such a precaution without good cause. We had a hint now and then that our situation was none of the safest; several Crow war-parties were known to be in the vicinity, and one of them, that passed here some time before, had peeled the bark from a neighboring tree, and engraved upon the white wood certain hieroglyphics, to signify that they had invaded the territories of their enemies, the Dahcotah, and set them at defiance. One morning a thick mist covered

the whole country. Shaw and Henry went out to ride, and soon came back with a startling piece of intelligence; they had found within rifle-shot of our camp the recent trail of about thirty horsemen. They could not be whites, and they could not be Dahcotah, since we knew no such parties to be in the neighborhood; therefore they must be Crows. Thanks to that friendly mist, we had escaped a hard battle; they would inevitably have attacked us and our Indian companions had they seen our camp. Whatever doubts we might have entertained, were removed a day or two after, by two or three Dahcotah, who came to us with an account of having hidden in a ravine on that very morning, from whence they saw and counted the Crows; they said that they followed them, carefully keeping out of sight, as they passed up Chugwater; that here the Crows discovered five dead bodies of Dahcotah, placed, according to custom, in trees, and flinging them to the ground, held their guns against them and blew them to atoms.

If our camp were not altogether safe, still it was comfortable enough; at least it was so to Shaw, for I was tormented with illness and vexed by the delay in the accomplishment of my designs. When a respite in my disorder gave me some returning strength, I rode out well armed upon the prairie, or bathed with Shaw in the stream, or waged a petty warfare with the inhabitants of a neighboring prairie-dog village. Around our fire at night we employed ourselves in inveighing against the fickleness and inconstancy of

Indians, and execrating The Whirlwind and all his crew. At last the thing grew insufferable.

"To-morrow morning," said I, "I will start for the fort, and see if I can hear any news there." Late that evening, when the fire had sunk low, and all the camp were asleep, a loud cry sounded from the darkness. Henry leaped up, recognized the voice, replied to it, and our dandy friend, "The Horse," rode in among us, just returned from his mission to the village. He coolly picketed his mare, without saying a word, sat down by the fire and began to eat, but his imperturbable philosophy was too much for our patience. Where was the village? — about fifty miles south of us; it was moving slowly, and would not arrive in less than a week. And where was Henry's squaw? — coming as fast as she could with Mahto-Tatonka, and the rest of her brothers, but she would never reach us, for she was dying, and asking every moment for Henry. Henry's manly face became clouded and downcast; he said that if we were willing he would go in the morning to find her, at which Shaw offered to accompany him.

We saddled our horses at sunrise. Reynal protested vehemently against being left alone, with nobody but the two Canadians and the young Indians, when enemies were in the neighborhood. Disregarding his complaints, we left him, and, coming to the mouth of Chugwater, separated, Shaw and Henry turning to the right, up the bank of the stream, while I made for the fort.

Taking leave for a while of my friend and the unfortunate squaw, I will relate by way of episode what I saw and did at Fort Laramie. It was not more than eighteen miles distant, and I reached it in three hours. A shrivelled little figure, wrapped from head to foot in a dingy white Canadian capote, stood in the gateway, holding by a cord of bull-hide a shaggy wild-horse, which he had lately caught. His sharp prominent features, and his keen snake-like eyes, looked out from beneath the shadowy hood of the capote, which was drawn over his head like the cowl of a Capuchin friar. His face was like an old piece of leather, and his mouth spread from ear to ear. Extending his long wiry hand, he welcomed me with something more cordial than the ordinary cold salute of an Indian, for we were excellent friends. We had made an exchange of horses to our mutual advantage; and Paul, thinking himself well treated, had declared everywhere that the white man had a good heart. He was a Dahcotah from the Missouri, a reputed son of the half-breed interpreter, Pierre Dorion, so often mentioned in Irving's "Astoria." He said that he was going to Richard's trading-house to sell his horse to some emigrants, who were encamped there, and asked me to go with him. We forded the stream together, Paul dragging his wild charge behind him. As we passed over the sandy plains beyond, he grew communicative. Paul was a cosmopolitan in his way; he had been to the settlements of the whites, and visited in peace and war

men of his nation within the range of a thousand miles. He [illegible] a negro, of French and another of English; yet nevertheless he was a thorough Indian; and as he told of the bloody deeds of his own people against their enemies, his little eyes would glitter with a lurid luster. He told how the Dahcotah exterminated a village of the Hurons on the Upper Missouri, slaughtering men, women, and children; and how, by an overwhelming force, they cut off sixteen of the brave Delawares, who fought like wolves to the last, amid the throng of their enemies. He told me another curious story, which I did not believe until I had heard it confirmed from so many independent sources that my scepticism was almost overcome.

Six years ago, a fellow named Jim Beckworth, a mongrel of French, American, and negro blood, was trading for the Fur Company, in a large village of the Crows. Jim Beckworth was last summer at St. Louis. He is a ruffian of the worst stamp; bloody and treacherous, without honor or honesty; such at least is the character he bears upon the prairie. Yet in his case the standard rules of character fail, for though he will stab a man in his sleep, he will also perform most desperate acts of daring; such, for instance, as the following: While he was in the Crow village, a Blackfoot war-party, between thirty and forty in number, came stealing through the country, killing stragglers and carrying off horses. The Crow warriors got upon their trail and pressed them so closely that they could not escape, at which the

Blackfeet, throwing up a semi-circular breastwork of logs at the foot of a precipice, coolly awaited their approach. The logs and sticks, piled four or five feet high, protected them in front. The Crows might have swept over the breastwork and exterminated their enemies; but though outnumbering them tenfold, they did not dream of storming the little fortification. Such a proceeding would be altogether repugnant to their notions of warfare. Whooping and yelling, and jumping from side to side like devils incarnate, they showered bullets and arrows upon the logs; not a Blackfoot was hurt, but several Crows, in spite of their leaping and dodging, were shot down. In this childish manner, the fight went on for an hour or two. Now and then a Crow warrior in an ecstasy of valor and vainglory would scream forth his war-song, boast himself the bravest and greatest of mankind, grasp his hatchet, rush up, strike it upon the breastwork, and then, as he retreated to his companions, fall dead under a shower of arrows; yet no combined attack was made. The Blackfeet remained secure in their intrenchment. At last Jim Beckworth lost patience.

"You are all fools and old women," he said to the Crows; "come with me, if any of you are brave enough, and I will show you how to fight."

He threw off his trapper's frock of buckskin and stripped himself naked, like the Indians themselves. He left his rifle on the ground, took in his hand a small light hatchet, and ran over the prairie to the

right, concealed by a hollow from the eyes of the Blackfeet. Then climbing up the rocks, he gained the top of the precipice behind them. Forty or fifty young Crow warriors followed him. By the cries and whoops that rose from below he knew that the Blackfeet were just beneath him; and running forward, he leaped down the rock into the midst of them. As he fell he caught one by the long loose hair, and dragging him down, tomahawked him; then grasping another by the belt at his waist, he struck him also a stunning blow, and, gaining his feet, shouted the Crow war-cry. He swung his hatchet so fiercely around him that the astonished Blackfeet bore back and gave him room. He might, had he chosen, have leaped over the breastwork and escaped; but this was not necessary, for with devilish yells the Crow warriors came dropping in quick succession over the rock among their enemies. The main body of the Crows, too, answered the cry from the front, and rushed up simultaneously. The convulsive struggle within the breastwork was frightful; for an instant the Blackfeet fought and yelled like pent-up tigers; but the butchery was soon complete, and the mangled bodies lay piled together under the precipice. Not a Blackfoot made his escape.

As Paul finished his story we came in sight of Richard's Fort, a disorderly crowd of men around it, and an emigrant camp a little in front.

"Now, Paul," said I, "where are your Minnicongew lodges?"

"Not come yet," said Paul; "maybe come to-morrow."

Two large villages of a band of Dahcotah had come three hundred miles from the Missouri, to join in the war, and they were expected to reach Richard's that morning. There was as yet no sign of their approach; so pushing through a noisy, drunken crowd, I entered an apartment of logs and mud, the largest in the fort: it was full of men of various races and complexions, all more or less drunk. A company of California emigrants, it seemed, had made the discovery at this late day that they had encumbered themselves with too many supplies for their journey. A part, therefore, they had thrown away, or sold at great loss to the traders; but had determined to get rid of their very copious stock of Missouri whiskey, by drinking it on the spot. Here were maudlin squaws stretched on piles of buffalo-robes; squalid Mexicans, armed with bows and arrows; Indians sedately drunk; long-haired Canadians and trappers, and American backwoodsmen in brown homespun, the well-beloved pistol and bowie-knife displayed openly at their sides. In the middle of the room a tall, lank man, with a dingy broadcloth coat, was haranguing the company in the style of the stump orator. With one hand he sawed the air, and with the other clutched firmly a brown jug of whiskey, which he applied every moment to his lips, forgetting that he had drained the contents long ago. Richard formally introduced me to this personage, who was no less a man than

Colonel R——, once the leader of the party. Instantly the colonel, seizing me, in the absence of buttons, by the leather fringes of my frock, began to define his position. His men, he said, had mutinied and deposed him; but still he exercised over them the influence of a superior mind; in all but the name he was yet their chief. As the colonel spoke, I looked round on the wild assemblage, and could not help thinking that he was but ill fitted to conduct such men across the deserts to California. Conspicuous among the rest stood three tall young men, grandsons of Daniel Boone. They had clearly inherited the adventurous character of that prince of pioneers; but I saw no signs of the quiet and tranquil spirit that so remarkably distinguished him.

Fearful was the fate that, months after, overtook some of the members of that party. General Kearney, on his late return from California, brought back their story. They were interrupted by the deep snows among the mountains, and, maddened by cold and hunger, fed upon each other's flesh!

I got tired of the confusion. "Come, Paul," said I, "we will be off." Paul sat in the sun, under the wall of the fort. He jumped up, mounted, and we rode towards Fort Laramie. When we reached it, a man came out of the gate with a pack at his back and a rifle on his shoulder; others were gathering about him, shaking him by the hand, as if taking leave. I thought it a strange thing that a man should set out alone and on foot for the prairie. I

Daniel Boone.

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soon got an explanation. Perrault — this, if I recollect right, was the Canadian's name — had quarrelled with the *bourgeois*, and the fort was too hot to hold him. Bordeaux, inflated with his transient authority, had abused him, and received a blow in return. The men then sprang at each other, and grappled in the middle of the fort. Bordeaux was down in an instant, at the mercy of the incensed Canadian; had not an old Indian, the brother of his squaw, seized hold of his antagonist, it would have fared ill with him. Perrault broke loose from the old Indian, and both the white men ran to their rooms for their guns; but when Bordeaux, looking from his door, saw the Canadian, gun in hand, standing in the area and calling on him to come out and fight, his heart failed him; he chose to remain where he was. In vain the old Indian, scandalized by his brother-in-law's cowardice, called upon him to go to the prairie and fight it out in the white man's manner; and Bordeaux's own squaw, equally incensed, screamed to her lord and master that he was a dog and an old woman. It all availed nothing. Bordeaux's prudence got the better of his valor, and he would not stir. Perrault stood showering opprobrious epithets at the recreant *bourgeois*, till, growing tired of this, he made up a pack of dried meat, and, slinging it at his back, set out alone for Fort Pierre, on the Missouri, a distance of three hundred miles, over a desert country, full of hostile Indians.

I remained in the fort that night. In the morn-

ing, as I was coming out from breakfast, talking with a trader named McCluskey, I saw a strange Indian leaning against the side of the gate. He was a tall, strong man, with heavy features.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"That 's The Whirlwind," said McCluskey. "He is the fellow that made all this stir about the war. It 's always the way with the Sioux; they never stop cutting each other's throats; it 's all they are fit for; instead of sitting in their lodges, and getting robes to trade with us in the winter. If this war goes on, we 'll make a poor trade of it next season, I reckon."

And this was the opinion of all the traders, who were vehemently opposed to the war, from the injury that it must occasion to their interests. The Whirlwind left his village the day before to make a visit to the fort. His warlike ardor had abated not a little since he first conceived the design of avenging his son's death. The long and complicated preparations for the expedition were too much for his fickle disposition. That morning Bordeaux fastened upon him, made him presents, and told him that if he went to war he would destroy his horses and kill no buffalo to trade with the white men; in short, that he was a fool to think of such a thing, and had better make up his mind to sit quietly in his lodge and smoke his pipe, like a wise man. The Whirlwind's purpose was evidently shaken; he had become tired, like a child, of his favorite plan. Bordeaux exultingly predicted that he would not go to war. My philan-

thropy was no match for my curiosity, and I was vexed at the possibility that after all I might lose the rare opportunity of seeing the ceremonies of war. The Whirlwind, however, had merely thrown the firebrand; the conflagration was become general. All the western bands of the Dahcotah were bent on war; and, as I heard from McCluskey, six large villages were already gathered on a little stream, forty miles distant, and were daily calling to the Great Spirit to aid them in their enterprise. McCluskey had just left them, and represented them as on their way to La Bonté's camp, which they would reach in a week, *unless they should learn that there were no buffalo there.* I did not like this condition, for buffalo this season were rare in the neighborhood. There were also the two Minnicongew villages that I mentioned before; but about noon, an Indian came from Richard's Fort with the news that they were quarrelling, breaking up, and dispersing. So much for the whiskey of the emigrants! Finding themselves unable to drink the whole, they had sold the residue to these Indians, and it needed no prophet to foretell the result; a spark dropped into a powder-magazine would not have produced a quicker effect. Instantly the old jealousies and rivalries and smothered feuds that exist in an Indian village broke out into furious quarrels. They forgot the warlike enterprise that had already brought them three hundred miles. They seemed like ungoverned children inflamed with the fiercest passions of men. Several of them were stabbed

in the drunken tumult; and in the morning they scattered and moved back towards the Missouri in small parties. I feared that, after all, the long-projected meeting and the ceremonies that were to attend it might never take place, and I should lose so admirable an opportunity of seeing the Indian under his most fearful and characteristic aspect; however, in foregoing this, I should avoid a very fair probability of being plundered and stripped, and it might be, stabbed or shot into the bargain. Consoling myself with this reflection, I prepared to carry the news, such as it was, to the camp.

I caught my horse, and to my vexation found that he had lost a shoe and broken his hoof against the rocks. Horses are shod at Fort Laramie at the moderate rate of three dollars a foot; so I tied Hendrick to a beam in the *corral*, and summoned Roubidou, the blacksmith. Roubidou, with the hoof between his knees, was at work with hammer and file, and I was inspecting the process, when a strange voice addressed me.

"Two more gone under! Well, there 's more of us left yet. Here 's Gingras and me off to the mountains to-morrow. Our turn will come next, I suppose. It 's a hard life, anyhow!"

I looked up and saw a man, not much more than five feet high, but of very square and strong proportions. In appearance he was particularly dingy; for his old buckskin frock was black and polished with time and grease, and his belt, knife, pouch, and

"The Arapahoes have just killed two of us in the mountains."

powder-horn appeared to have seen the roughest service. The first joint of each foot was entirely gone, having been frozen off several winters before, and his moccasons were curtailed in proportion. His whole appearance and equipment bespoke the "free trapper." He had a round, ruddy face, animated with a spirit of carelessness and gayety not at all in accordance with the words he had just spoken.

"'Two more gone,'" said I; "what do you mean by that?"

"Oh, the Arapahoes have just killed two of us in the mountains. Old Bull-Tail has come to tell us. They stabbed one behind his back, and shot the other with his own rifle. That's the way we live here! I mean to give up trapping after this year. My squaw says she wants a pacing horse and some red ribbons: I'll make enough beaver to get them for her, and then I'm done! I'll go below and live on a farm."

"Your bones will dry on the prairie, Rouleau!" said another trapper, who was standing by; a strong, brutal-looking fellow, with a face as surly as a bull-dog's.

Rouleau only laughed, and began to hum a tune and shuffle a dance on his stumps of feet.

"You'll see us, before long, passing up your way," said the other man.

"Well," said I, "stop and take a cup of coffee with us;" and, as it was late in the afternoon, I prepared to leave the fort at once.

As I rode out, a train of emigrant wagons was passing across the stream. "Whar are ye goin', stranger?" Thus I was saluted by two or three voices at once.

"About eighteen miles up the creek."

"It 's mighty late to be going that far! Make haste, ye 'd better, and keep a bright look-out for Indians!"

I thought the advice too good to be neglected. Fording the stream, I passed at a round trot over the plains beyond. But "the more haste, the worse speed." I proved the truth of the proverb by the time I reached the hills three miles from the fort. The trail was faintly marked, and, riding forward with more rapidity than caution, I lost sight of it. I kept on in a direct line, guided by Laramie Creek, which I could see at intervals darkly glistening in the evening sun, at the bottom of the woody gulf on my right. Half an hour before sunset I came upon its banks. There was something exciting in the wild solitude of the place. An antelope sprang suddenly from the sage-bushes before me. As he leaped gracefully not thirty yards before my horse, I fired, and instantly he spun round and fell. Quite sure of him, I walked my horse towards him, leisurely reloading my rifle, when, to my surprise, he sprang up and trotted rapidly away on three legs into the dark recesses of the hills, whither I had no time to follow. Ten minutes after, I was passing along the bottom of a deep valley, and, chancing to look behind me, I

saw in the dim light that something was following. Supposing it to be a wolf, I slid from my seat and sat down behind my horse to shoot it; but as it came up, I saw by its motions that it was another antelope. It approached within a hundred yards, arched its neck, and gazed intently. I levelled at the white spot on its chest, and was about to fire, when it started off, ran first to one side and then to the other, like a vessel tacking against the wind, and at last stretched away at full speed. Then it stopped again, looked curiously behind it, and trotted up as before; but not so boldly, for it soon paused and stood gazing at me. I fired; it leaped upward and fell upon its tracks. Measuring the distance, I found it two hundred and four paces. When I stood by his side, the antelope turned his expiring eye upward. It was like a beautiful woman's, dark and bright. "Fortunate that I am in a hurry," thought I; "I might be troubled with remorse, if I had time for it."

Cutting the animal up, not in the most skilful manner, I hung the meat at the back of my saddle, and rode on again. The hills (I could not remember one of them) closed around me. "It is too late," thought I, "to go forward. I will stay here to-night, and look for the path in the morning." As a last effort, however, I ascended a high hill, from which, to my great satisfaction, I could see Laramie Creek stretching before me, twisting from side to side amid ragged patches of timber; and far off, close beneath the shadows of the trees, the ruins of the

old trading-fort were visible. I reached them at twilight. It was far from pleasant, in that uncertain light, to be pushing through the dense trees and bushes of the grove beyond. I listened anxiously for the footfall of man or beast. Nothing was stirring but one harmless brown bird, chirping among the branches. I was glad when I gained the open prairie once more, where I could see if anything approached. When I came to the mouth of Chugwater, it was totally dark. Slackening the reins, I let my horse take his own course. He trotted on with unerring instinct, and by nine o'clock was scrambling down the steep descent into the meadows where we were encamped. While I was looking in vain for the light of the fire, Hendrick, with keener perceptions, gave a loud neigh, which was immediately answered by another neigh from the distance. In a moment I was hailed from the darkness by the voice of Reynal, who had come out, rifle in hand, to see who was approaching.

He, with his squaw, the two Canadians, and the Indian boys, were the sole inmates of the camp, Shaw and Henry Chatillon being still absent. At noon of the following day they came back, their horses looking none the better for the journey. Henry seemed dejected. The woman was dead, and his children must henceforward be exposed, without a protector, to the hardships and vicissitudes of Indian life. Even in the midst of his grief he had not forgotten his attachment to his *bourgeois*, for he had procured

among his Indian relatives two beautifully ornamented buffalo-robes, which he spread on the ground as a present to us.

Shaw lighted his pipe, and told me in a few words the history of his journey. When I went to the fort they left me, as I mentioned, at the mouth of Chugwater. They followed the course of the little stream all day, traversing a desolate and barren country. Several times they came upon the fresh traces of a large war-party, the same, no doubt, from whom we had so narrowly escaped an attack. At an hour before sunset, without encountering a human being by the way, they came upon the lodges of the squaw and her brothers, who, in compliance with Henry's message, had left the Indian village, in order to join us at our camp. The lodges were already pitched, five in number, by the side of the stream. The woman lay in one of them, reduced to a mere skeleton. For some time she had been unable to move or speak. Indeed, nothing had kept her alive but the hope of seeing Henry, to whom she was strongly and faithfully attached. No sooner did he enter the lodge than she revived, and conversed with him the greater part of the night. Early in the morning she was lifted into a *traineau*, and the whole party set out towards our camp. There were but five warriors; the rest were women and children. The whole were in great alarm at the proximity of the Crow war-party, who would certainly have killed them without mercy had they met. They had

advanced only a mile or two, when they discerned a horseman, far off, on the edge of the horizon. They all stopped, gathering together in the greatest anxiety, from which they did not recover until long after the horseman disappeared; then they set out again. Henry was riding with Shaw a few rods in advance of the Indians, when Mahto-Tatonka, a younger brother of the woman, hastily called after them. Turning back, they found all the Indians crowded around the *traineau* in which the woman was lying. They reached her just in time to hear the death-rattle in her throat. In a moment she lay dead in the basket of the vehicle. A complete stillness succeeded; then the Indians raised in concert their cries of lamentation over the corpse, and among them Shaw clearly distinguished those strange sounds resembling the word "Halleluyah," which, together with some other accidental coincidences, has given rise to the absurd notion that the Indians are descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel.

The Indian usage required that Henry, as well as the other relatives of the woman, should make valuable presents, to be placed by the side of the body at its last resting-place. Leaving the Indians, he and Shaw set out for the camp, and reached it, as we have seen, by hard pushing, at about noon. Having obtained the necessary articles, they immediately returned. It was very late and quite dark when they again reached the lodges. They were all placed in a deep hollow among dreary hills. Four

of them were just visible through the gloom, but the fifth and largest was illumined by the blaze of a fire within, glowing through the half-transparent covering of raw hides. There was a perfect stillness as they approached. The lodges seemed without a tenant. Not a living thing was stirring; there was something awful in the scene. They rode up to the entrance of the lodge, and there was no sound but the tramp of their horses. A squaw came out and took charge of the animals, without speaking a word. Entering, they found the lodge crowded with Indians; a fire was burning in the midst, and the mourners encircled it in a triple row. Room was made for the new-comers at the head of the lodge, a robe spread for them to sit upon, and a pipe lighted and handed to them in perfect silence. Thus they passed the greater part of the night. At times the fire would subside into a heap of embers, until the dark figures seated around it were scarcely visible; then a squaw would drop upon it a piece of buffalo-fat, and a bright flame, instantly springing up, would reveal the crowd of wild faces, motionless as bronze. The silence continued unbroken. It was a relief to Shaw when daylight returned and he could escape from this house of mourning. He and Henry prepared to return homeward; first, however, they placed the presents they had brought near the body of the squaw, which, gaudily attired, remained in a sitting posture in one of the lodges. A fine horse was picketed not far off, destined to be killed that morning

for the service of her spirit; for the woman was lame, and could not travel on foot over the dismal prairies to the villages of the dead. Food, too, was provided, and household implements, for her use upon this last journey.

Henry left her to the care of her relatives, and came immediately with Shaw to the camp. It was some time before he entirely recovered from his dejection.

CHAPTER XI.

SCENES AT THE CAMP.

REYNAL heard guns fired one day, at the distance of a mile or two from the camp. He grew nervous instantly. Visions of Crow war-parties began to haunt his imagination; and when we returned (for we were all absent), he renewed his complaints about being left alone with the Canadians and the squaw. The day after, the cause of the alarm appeared. Four trappers, called Morin, Saraphin, Rouleau, and Gingras, came to our camp and joined us. They it was who fired the guns and disturbed the dreams of our confederate Reynal. They soon encamped by our side. Their rifles, dingy and battered with hard service, rested with ours against the old tree; their strong rude saddles, their buffalo-robes, their traps, and the few rough and simple articles of their travelling equipment were piled near our tent. Their mountain-horses were turned to graze in the meadow among our own; and the men themselves, no less rough and hardy, used to lie half the day in the shade of our tree, lolling on the grass, lazily smoking, and telling stories of their adventures; and I defy the annals of chivalry to furnish the record of a life more

wild and perilous than that of a Rocky Mountain trapper.

With this efficient reinforcement the agitation of Reynal's nerves subsided. We began to conceive a sort of attachment to our old camping-ground; yet it was time to change our quarters, since remaining too long on one spot must lead to unpleasant results, not to be borne unless in case of dire necessity. The grass no longer presented a smooth surface of turf; it was trampled into mud and clay. So we removed to another old tree, larger yet, that grew by the side of the river a furlong distant. Its trunk was full six feet in diameter; on one side it was marked by a party of Indians with various inexplicable hieroglyphics, commemorating some warlike enterprise, and aloft among the branches were the remains of a scaffold, where dead bodies had once been deposited, after the Indian manner.

"There comes Bull-Bear," said Henry Chatillon, as we sat on the grass at dinner. Looking up, we saw several horsemen coming over the neighboring hill, and in a moment four stately young men rode up and dismounted. One of them was Bull-Bear, or Mahto-Tatonka, a compound name which he inherited from his father, the principal chief in the Ogillallah band. One of his brothers and two other young men accompanied him. We shook hands with the visitors, and when we had finished our meal — for this is the approved manner of entertaining Indians, even the best of them — we handed to each a tin cup of coffee

and a biscuit, at which they ejaculated from the bottom of their throats, "How! how!" a monosyllable by which an Indian contrives to express half the emotions of which he is susceptible. Then we lighted the pipe, and passed it to them as they squatted on the ground.

"Where is the village?"

"There," said Mahto-Tatonka, pointing southward; "it will come in two days."

"Will they go to the war?"

"Yes."

No man is a philanthropist on the prairie. We welcomed this news cordially, and congratulated ourselves that Bordeaux's interested efforts to divert The Whirlwind from his congenial vocation of bloodshed had failed of success, and that no further obstacles would interpose between us and our plan of repairing to the rendezvous at La Bonté's camp.

For that and several succeeding days, Mahto-Tatonka and his friends remained our guests. They devoured the relics of our meals; they filled the pipe for us, and also helped us to smoke it. Sometimes they stretched themselves side by side in the shade, indulging in raillery and equivocal jokes, ill becoming the dignity of brave and aspiring warriors, such as two of them in reality were.

Two days dragged away, and on the morning of the third we hoped confidently to see the Indian village. It did not come; so we rode out to look for it. In place of the eight hundred Indians we expected,

we met one solitary savage riding towards us over the prairie, who told us that the Indians had changed their plan, and would not come within three days. Taking along with us this messenger of evil tidings, we retraced our footsteps to the camp, amusing ourselves by the way with execrating Indian inconstancy. When we came in sight of our little white tent under the big tree, we saw that it no longer stood alone. A huge old lodge was erected by its side, discolored by rain and storms, rotten with age, with the uncouth figures of horses and men and outstretched hands that were painted upon it wellnigh obliterated. The long poles which supported this squalid habitation thrust themselves rakishly out from its pointed top, and over its entrance were suspended a "medicine-pipe" and various other implements of the magic art. While we were yet at a distance, we observed a greatly increased population of various colors and dimensions, swarming about our quiet encampment. Morin, the trapper, having been absent for a day or two, had returned, it seemed, bringing all his family with him. He had taken to himself a wife, for whom he had paid the established price of one horse. This looks cheap at first sight, but in truth the purchase of a squaw is a transaction which no man should enter into without mature deliberation, since it involves not only the payment of the price, but the burden of feeding and supporting a rapacious horde of the bride's relatives, who hold themselves entitled to feed upon the indiscreet

white man. They gather about him like leeches, and drain him of all he has.

Morin had not made an aristocratic match. His bride's relatives occupied but a contemptible position in Ogillallah society; for among these democrats of the prairie, as among others more civilized, there are virtual distinctions of rank and place. Morin's partner was not the most beautiful of her sex, and he had the bad taste to array her in an old calico gown, bought from an emigrant woman, instead of the neat tunic of whitened deer-skin usually worn by the squaws. The moving spirit of the establishment was an old hag of eighty. Human imagination never conceived hobgoblin or witch more ugly than she. You could count all her ribs through the wrinkles of her leathery skin. Her withered face more resembled an old skull than the countenance of a living being, even to the hollow, darkened sockets, at the bottom of which glittered her little black eyes. Her arms had dwindled into nothing but whip-cord and wire. Her hair, half black, half gray, hung in total neglect nearly to the ground, and her sole garment consisted of the remnant of a discarded buffalo-robe tied round her waist with a string of hide. Yet the old squaw's meagre anatomy was wonderfully strong. She pitched the lodge, packed the horses, and did the hardest labor of the camp. From morning till night she bustled about the lodge, screaming like a screech-owl when anything displeased her. Her brother, a "medicine-man," or magician, was equally gaunt

and sinewy with herself. His mouth spread from ear to ear, and his appetite, as we had occasion to learn, was ravenous in proportion. The other inmates of the lodge were a young bride and bridegroom, the latter one of those idle, good-for-nothing fellows who infest an Indian village as well as more civilized communities. He was fit neither for hunting nor war, as one might see from the stolid unmeaning expression of his face. The happy pair had just entered upon the honeymoon. They would stretch a buffalo-robe upon poles, to protect them from the rays of the sun, and spreading under it a couch of furs, would sit affectionately side by side for half the day, though I could not discover that much conversation passed between them. Probably they had nothing to say; for an Indian's supply of topics for conversation is far from being copious. There were half a dozen children, too, playing and whooping about the camp, shooting birds with little bows and arrows, or making miniature lodges of sticks, as children of a different complexion build houses of blocks.

A day passed, and Indians began rapidly to come in. Parties of two, three, or more would ride up and silently seat themselves on the grass. The fourth day came at last, when about noon horsemen appeared in view on the summit of the neighboring ridge. Behind followed a wild procession, hurrying in haste and disorder down the hill and over the plain below; horses, mules, and dogs; heavily-

burdened *traineaux*, mounted warriors, squaws walking amid the throng, and a host of children. For a full half-hour they continued to pour down; and keeping directly to the bend of the stream, within a furlong of us, they soon assembled there, a dark and confused throng, until, as if by magic, a hundred and fifty tall lodges sprang up. The lonely plain was transformed into the site of a swarming encampment. Countless horses were soon grazing over the meadows around us, and the prairie was animated by restless figures careering on horseback, or sedately stalking in their long white robes. The Whirlwind was come at last. One question yet remained to be answered: "Will he go to the war in order that we, with so respectable an escort, may pass over to the somewhat perilous rendezvous at La Bonté's camp?"

This still remained in doubt. Characteristic indecision perplexed their councils. Indians cannot act in large bodies. Though their object be of the highest importance, they cannot combine to attain it by a series of connected efforts. King Philip, Pontiac, and Tecumseh, all felt this to their cost. The Ogillallah once had a war-chief who could control them; but he was dead, and now they were left to the sway of their own unsteady impulses.

As this Indian village and its inhabitants will hold a prominent place in the rest of the story, perhaps it may not be amiss to glance for an instant at the savage people of which they form a part. The Dahcotah or Sioux range over a vast territory, from the river

St. Peter to the Rocky Mountains. They are divided into several independent bands, united under no central government, and acknowledging no common head. The same language, usages, and superstitions form the sole bond between them. They do not unite even in their wars. The bands of the east fight the Ojibwas on the Upper Lakes; those of the west make incessant war upon the Snake Indians in the Rocky Mountains. As the whole people is divided into bands, so each band is divided into villages. Each village has a chief, who is honored and obeyed only so far as his personal qualities may command respect and fear. Sometimes he is a mere nominal chief; sometimes his authority is little short of absolute, and his fame and influence reach beyond his own village, so that the whole band to which he belongs is ready to acknowledge him as their head. This was, a few years since, the case with the Ogillallah. Courage, address, and enterprise may raise any warrior to the highest honor, especially if he be the son of a former chief, or a member of a numerous family, to support him and avenge his quarrels; but when he has reached the dignity of chief, and the old men and warriors, by a peculiar ceremony, have formally installed him, let it not be imagined that he assumes any of the outward signs of rank and honor. He knows too well on how frail a tenure he holds his station. He must conciliate his uncertain subjects. Many a man in the village lives better, owns more squaws and more horses, and goes better clad than

he. Like the Teutonic chiefs of old, he ingratiates himself with his young men by making them presents, thereby often impoverishing himself. If he fails to gain their favor, they will set his authority at naught, and may desert him at any moment; for the usages of his people have provided no means of enforcing his authority. Very seldom does it happen, at least among these western bands, that a chief attains to much power, unless he is the head of a numerous family. Frequently the village is principally made up of his relatives and descendants, and the wandering community assumes much of the patriarchal character.

The western Dahcotah have no fixed habitations. Hunting and fighting, they wander incessantly, through summer and winter. Some follow the herds of buffalo over the waste of prairie; others traverse the Black Hills, thronging, on horseback and on foot, through the dark gulfs and sombre gorges, and emerging at last upon the "Parks," those beautiful but most perilous hunting-grounds. The buffalo supplies them with the necessaries of life; with habitations, food, clothing, beds, and fuel; strings for their bows, glue, thread, cordage, trail-ropes for their horses, coverings for their saddles, vessels to hold water, boats to cross streams, and the means of purchasing all that they want from the traders. When the buffalo are extinct, they too must dwindle away.

War is the breath of their nostrils. Against most

of the neighboring tribes they cherish a rancorous hatred, transmitted from father to son, and inflamed by constant aggression and retaliation. Many times a year, in every village, the Great Spirit is called upon, fasts are made, the war-parade is celebrated, and the warriors go out by handfuls at a time against the enemy. This fierce spirit awakens their most eager aspirations, and calls forth their greatest energies. It is chiefly this that saves them from lethargy and utter abasement. Without its powerful stimulus they would be like the unwarlike tribes beyond the mountains, scattered among the caves and rocks like beasts, and living on roots and reptiles. These latter have little of humanity except the form; but the proud and ambitious Dahcotah warrior can sometimes boast heroic virtues. It is seldom that distinction and influence are attained among them by any other course than that of arms. Their superstition, however, sometimes gives great power to those among them who pretend to the character of magicians; and their orators, such as they are, have their share of honor.

But to return. Look into our tent, or enter, if you can bear the stifling smoke and the close air. There, wedged close together, you will see a circle of stout warriors, passing the pipe around, joking, telling stories, and making themselves merry after their fashion. We were also infested by little copper-colored naked boys and snake-eyed girls. They would come up to us, muttering certain words,

which being interpreted conveyed the concise invitation, "Come and eat." Then we would rise, cursing the pertinacity of Dahcotah hospitality, which allowed scarcely an hour of rest between sun and sun, and to which we were bound to do honor, unless we would offend our entertainers. This necessity was particularly burdensome to me, as I was scarcely able to walk, from the effects of illness, and was poorly qualified to dispose of twenty meals a day. So bounteous an entertainment looks like an outgushing of goodwill; but, doubtless, half at least of our kind hosts, had they met us alone and unarmed on the prairie, would have robbed us of our horses, and perhaps have bestowed an arrow upon us besides.

One morning we were summoned to the lodge of an old man, the Nestor of his tribe. We found him half sitting, half reclining, on a pile of buffalo-robes; his long hair, jet-black, though he had seen some eighty winters, hung on either side of his thin features. His gaunt but symmetrical frame did not more clearly exhibit the wreck of bygone strength, than did his dark, wasted features, still prominent and commanding, bear the stamp of mental energies. Opposite the patriarch was his nephew, the young aspirant Mahto-Tatonka; and besides these, there were one or two women in the lodge.

The old man's story is peculiar, and illustrative of a superstition that prevails in full force among many of the Indian tribes. He was one of a powerful family, renowned for warlike exploits. When a

very young man, he submitted to the singular rite to which most of the tribe subject themselves before entering upon life. He painted his face black; then seeking out a cavern in a sequestered part of the Black Hills, he lay for several days, fasting, and praying to the spirits. In the dreams and visions produced by his weakened and excited state, he fancied, like all Indians, that he saw supernatural revelations. Again and again the form of an antelope appeared before him. The antelope is the graceful peace spirit of the Ogillallah; but seldom is it that such a gentle visitor presents itself during the initiatory fasts of their young men. The terrible grizzly bear, the divinity of war, usually appears to fire them with martial ardor and thirst for renown. At length the antelope spoke. It told the young dreamer that he was not to follow the path of war; that a life of peace and tranquillity was marked out for him; that thenceforward he was to guide the people by his counsels, and protect them from the evils of their own feuds and dissensions. Others were to gain renown by fighting the enemy; but greatness of a different kind was in store for him.

The visions beheld during the period of this fast usually determine the whole course of the dreamer's life. From that time, Le Borgne, which was the only name by which we knew him, abandoned all thoughts of war, and devoted himself to the labors of peace. He told his vision to the people. They honored his commission and respected him in his novel capacity.

A far different man was his brother, Mahto-Tatonka, who had left his name, his features, and many of his qualities, to his son. He was the father of Henry Chatillon's squaw, a circumstance which proved of some advantage to us, as it secured the friendship of a family perhaps the most noted and influential in the whole Ogillallah band; Mahto-Tatonka, in his way, was a hero. No chief could vie with him in warlike renown, or in power over his people. He had a fearless spirit, and an impetuous and inflexible resolution. His will was law. He was politic and sagacious, and with true Indian craft, always befriended the whites, knowing that he might thus reap great advantages for himself and his adherents. When he had resolved on any course of conduct, he would pay to the warriors the compliment of calling them together to deliberate upon it, and when their debates were over, quietly state his own opinion, which no one ever disputed. It fared hard with those who incurred his displeasure. He would strike them or stab them on the spot; and this act, which, if attempted by any other chief would have cost him his life, the awe inspired by his name enabled him to repeat again and again with impunity. In a community where, from immemorial time, no man has acknowledged any law but his own will, Mahto-Tatonka raised himself to power little short of despotic. His career came at last to an end. He had a host of enemies patiently biding their time; and our old friend Smoke in particular, together with all his

kinsmen, hated him cordially. Smoke sat one day in his lodge, in the midst of his own village, when Mahto-Tatonka entered it alone, and approaching the dwelling of his enemy, challenged him in a loud voice to come out, and fight. Smoke would not move. At this, Mahto-Tatonka proclaimed him a coward and an old woman, and, striding to the entrance of the lodge, stabbed the chief's best horse, which was picketed there. Smoke was daunted, and even this insult failed to bring him out. Mahto-Tatonka moved haughtily away; all made way for him; but his hour of reckoning was near.

One hot day, five or six years ago, numerous lodges of Smoke's kinsmen were gathered about some of the Fur Company's men, who were trading in various articles with them, whiskey among the rest. Mahto-Tatonka was also there with a few of his people. As he lay in his own lodge, a fray arose between his adherents and the kinsmen of his enemy. The war-whoop was raised, bullets and arrows began to fly, and the camp was in confusion. The chief sprang up, and rushing in a fury from the lodge, shouted to the combatants on both sides to cease. Instantly — for the attack was preconcerted — came the reports of two or three guns, and the twanging of a dozen bows, and the savage hero, mortally wounded, pitched forward headlong to the ground. Rouleau was present, and told me the particulars. The tumult became general, and was not quelled until several had fallen on both sides. When we

were in the country the feud between the two families was still rankling.

Thus died Mahto-Tatonka; but he left behind him a goodly army of descendants, to perpetuate his renown and avenge his fate. Besides daughters, he had thirty sons, a number which need not stagger the credulity of those acquainted with Indian usages and practices. We saw many of them, all marked by the same dark complexion, and the same peculiar cast of features. Of these, our visitor, young Mahto-Tatonka, was the eldest, and some reported him as likely to succeed to his father's honors. Though he appeared not more than twenty-one years old, he had oftener struck the enemy, and stolen more horses and more squaws, than any young man in the village. Horse-stealing is well known as an avenue to distinction on the prairies, and the other kind of depredation is esteemed equally meritorious. Not that the act can confer fame from its own intrinsic merits. Any one can steal a squaw, and if he chooses afterwards to make an adequate present to her rightful proprietor, the easy husband for the most part rests content, his vengeance falls asleep, and all danger from that quarter is averted. Yet this is regarded as a pitiful and mean-spirited transaction. The danger is averted, but the glory of the achievement also is lost. Mahto-Tatonka proceeded after a more dashing fashion. Out of several dozen squaws whom he had stolen, he could boast that he had never paid for one, but snapping his fingers in the face of the

injured husband, had defied the extremity of his indignation, and no one yet had dared to lay the finger of violence upon him. He was following close in the footsteps of his father. The young men and the young squaws, each in their way, admired him. The former would always follow him to war, and he was esteemed to have an unrivalled charm in the eyes of the latter. Perhaps his impunity may excite some wonder. An arrow-shot from a ravine, or a stab given in the dark, require no great valor, and are especially suited to the Indian genius; but Mahto-Tatonka had a strong protection. It was not alone his courage and audacious will that enabled him to career so dashingly among his compeers. His enemies did not forget that he was one of thirty warlike brethren, all growing up to manhood. Should they wreak their anger upon him, many keen eyes would be ever upon them, and many fierce hearts thirst for their blood. The avenger would dog their footsteps everywhere. To kill Mahto-Tatonka would be an act of suicide.

Though he found such favor in the eyes of the fair, he was no dandy. He was indifferent to the gaudy trappings and ornaments of his companions, and was content to rest his chances of success upon his own warlike merits. He never arrayed himself in gaudy blanket and glittering necklaces, but left his statue-like form, limbed like an Apollo of bronze, to win its way to favor. His voice was singularly deep and strong, and sounded from his chest like the

deep notes of an organ. Yet, after all, he was but an Indian. See him as he lies there in the sun before our tent, kicking his heels in the air and cracking jokes with his brother. Does he look like a hero? See him now in the hour of his glory, when at sunset the whole village empties itself to behold him, for to-morrow their favorite young partisan goes out against the enemy. His head-dress is adorned with a crest of the war-eagle's feathers, rising in a waving ridge above his brow, and sweeping far behind him. His round white shield hangs at his breast, with feathers radiating from the centre like a star. His quiver is at his back; his tall lance in his hand, the iron point flashing against the declining sun, while the long scalp-locks of his enemies flutter from the shaft. Thus, gorgeous as a champion in panoply, he rides round and round within the great circle of lodges, balancing with a graceful buoyancy to the free movements of his war-horse, while with a sedate brow he sings his song to the Great Spirit. Young rival warriors look askance at him; vermilion-cheeked girls gaze in admiration; boys whoop and scream in a thrill of delight, and old women yell forth his name and proclaim his praises from lodge to lodge.

Mahto-Tatonka was the best of all our Indian friends. Hour after hour, and day after day, when swarms of savages of every age, sex, and degree beset our camp, he would lie in our tent, his lynx-eye ever open to guard our property from pillage.

The Whirlwind invited us one day to his lodge.

The feast was finished, and the pipe began to circulate. It was a remarkably large and fine one, and I expressed admiration of it.

"If the Meneaska likes the pipe," asked The Whirlwind, "why does he not keep it?"

Such a pipe among the Ogillallah is valued at the price of a horse. The gift seemed worthy of a chieftain and a warrior; but The Whirlwind's generosity rose to no such pitch. He gave me the pipe, confidently expecting that I in return would make him a present of equal or superior value. This is the implied condition of every gift among the Indians, and should it not be complied with, the present is usually reclaimed. So I arranged upon a gaudy calico handkerchief an assortment of vermilion, tobacco, knives, and gunpowder, and summoning the chief to camp, assured him of my friendship, and begged his acceptance of a slight token of it. Ejaculating, "How! how!" he folded up the offerings and withdrew to his lodge.

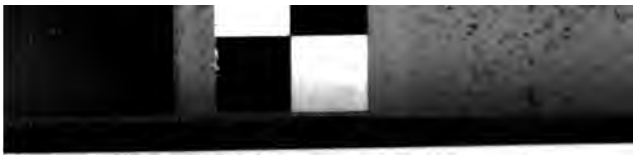
Late one afternoon a party of Indians on horseback came suddenly in sight from behind some clumps of bushes that lined the bank of the stream, leading with them a mule, on whose back was a wretched negro, sustained in his seat by the high pommel and cantle of the Indian saddle. His cheeks were shrunken in the hollow of his jaws; his eyes were unnaturally dilated, and his lips shrivelled and drawn back from his teeth like those of a corpse. When they brought him before our tent, and lifted him from the saddle,

he could not walk or stand, but crawled a short distance, and with a look of utter misery sat down on the grass. All the children and women came pouring out of the lodges, and with screams and cries made a circle about him, while he sat supporting himself with his hands, and looking from side to side with a vacant stare. The wretch was starving to death. For thirty-three days he had wandered alone on the prairie, without weapon of any kind; without shoes, moccasons, or any other clothing than an old jacket and trousers; without intelligence to guide his course, or any knowledge of the productions of the prairie. All this time he had subsisted on crickets and lizards, wild onions, and three eggs which he found in the nest of a prairie-dove. He had not seen a human being. Bewildered in the boundless, hopeless desert that stretched around him, he had walked on in despair, till he could walk no longer, and then crawled on his knees, till the bone was laid bare. He chose the night for travelling, lying down by day to sleep in the glaring sun, always dreaming, as he said, of the broth and corn-cake he used to eat under his old master's shed in Missouri. Every man in the camp, both white and red, was astonished at his escape not only from starvation, but from the grizzly bears, which abound in that neighborhood, and the wolves which howled around him every night.

Reynal recognized him the moment the Indians brought him in. He had run away from his master

about a year before and joined the party of Richard, who was then leaving the frontier for the mountains. He had lived with Richard until, at the end of May, he with Reynal and several other men went out in search of some stray horses, when he was separated from the rest in a storm, and had never been heard of to this time. Knowing his inexperience and helplessness, no one dreamed that he could still be living. The Indians had found him lying exhausted on the ground.

As he sat there, with the Indians gazing silently on him, his haggard face and glazed eye were disgusting to look upon. Deslauriers made him a bowl of gruel, but he suffered it to remain untasted before him. At length he languidly raised the spoon to his lips; again he did so, and again; and then his appetite seemed suddenly inflamed into madness, for he seized the bowl, swallowed all its contents in a few seconds, and eagerly demanded meat. This we refused, telling him to wait until morning; but he begged so eagerly that we gave him a small piece, which he devoured, tearing it like a dog. He said he must have more. We told him that his life was in danger if he ate so immoderately at first. He assented, and said he knew he was a fool to do so, but he must have meat. This we absolutely refused, to the great indignation of the senseless squaws, who, when we were not watching him, would slyly bring dried meat and *pommes blanches*, and place them on the ground by his side. Still this was not enough for

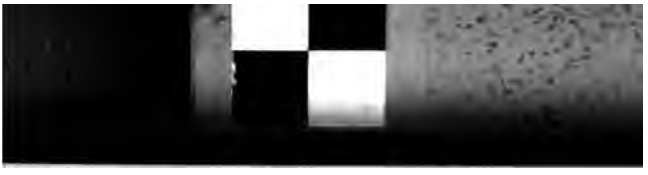


him. When it grew dark he contrived to creep away between the legs of the horses and crawl over to the Indian camp. Here he fed to his heart's content, and was brought back again in the morning, when Gingras, the trapper, put him on horseback and carried him to the fort. He managed to survive the effects of his greediness. Though slightly deranged when we left this part of the country, he was otherwise in tolerable health, and expressed his firm conviction that nothing could ever kill him.

When the sun was yet an hour high, it was a gay scene in the village. The warriors stalked sedately among the lodges, or along the margin of the stream, or walked out to visit the bands of horses that were feeding over the prairie. Half the population deserted the close and heated lodges and betook themselves to the water; and here you might see boys and girls, and young squaws, splashing, swimming, and diving, beneath the afternoon sun, with merry screams and laughter. But when the sun was resting above the broken peaks, and the purple mountains threw their shadows for miles over the prairie; when our old tree basked peacefully in the horizontal rays, and the swelling plains and scattered groves were softened into a tranquil beauty, — then the scene around our tent was worthy of a Salvator. Savage figures, with quivers at their backs, and guns, lances, or tomahawks in their hands, sat on horseback, motionless as statues, their arms crossed on their breasts and their eyes fixed in a steady unwavering gaze upon

us. Others stood erect, wrapped from head to foot in their long white robes of buffalo-hide. Others sat together on the grass, holding their shaggy horses by a rope, with their dark busts exposed to view as they suffered their robes to fall from their shoulders. Others again stood carelessly among the throng, with nothing to conceal the matchless symmetry of their forms. There was one in particular, a ferocious fellow, named The Mad Wolf, who, with the bow in his hand and the quiver at his back, might have seemed, but for his face, the Pythian Apollo himself. Such a figure rose before the imagination of West, when, on first seeing the Belvedere in the Vatican, he exclaimed, "By God, a Mohawk!"

When the prairie grew dark, the horses were driven in and secured near the camp, and the crowd began to melt away. Fires gleamed around, duskily revealing the rough trappers and the graceful Indians. One of the families near us was always gathered about a bright fire that lighted up the interior of their lodge. Withered, witch-like hags flitted around the blaze; and here for hour after hour sat a circle of children and young girls, laughing and talking, their round merry faces glowing in the ruddy light. We could hear the monotonous notes of the drum from the Indian camp, with the chant of the war-song, deadened in the distance, and the long chorus of quavering yells, where the war-dance was going on in the largest lodge. For several nights, too, we heard wild and mournful cries, rising and dying away like



the melancholy voice of a wolf. They came from the sisters and female relatives of Mahto-Tatonka, who were gashing their limbs with knives, and bewailing the death of Henry Chatillon's squaw. The hour would grow late before all went to rest in our camp. Then, while the embers of the fires glowed dimly, the men lay stretched in their blankets on the ground, and nothing could be heard but the restless motions of the crowded horses.

I recall these scenes with a mixed feeling of pleasure and pain. At this time, I was so reduced by illness that I could seldom walk without reeling like a drunken man, and when I rose from my seat upon the ground, the landscape suddenly grew dim before my eyes, the trees and lodges seemed to sway to and fro, and the prairie to rise and fall like the swells of the ocean. Such a state of things is not enviable anywhere. In a country where a man's life may at any moment depend on the strength of his arm, or it may be on the activity of his legs, it is more particularly inconvenient. Nor is sleeping on damp ground, with an occasional drenching from a shower, very beneficial in such cases. I sometimes suffered the extremity of exhaustion, and was in a tolerably fair way of atoning for my love of the prairie by resting there forever.

I tried repose and a very sparing diet. For a long time, with exemplary patience, I lounged about the camp, or at the utmost staggered over to the Indian village, and walked faint and dizzy among the lodges.

It would not do; and I bethought me of starvation. During five days I sustained life on one small biscuit a day. At the end of that time I was weaker than before, but the disorder seemed shaken in its stronghold, and very gradually I began to resume a less rigid diet.

I used to lie languid and dreamy before our tent, musing on the past and the future, and when most overcome with lassitude, my eyes turned always towards the distant Black Hills. There is a spirit of energy in mountains, and they impart it to all who approach them. At that time I did not know how many dark superstitions and gloomy legends are associated with the Black Hills in the minds of the Indians, but I felt an eager desire to penetrate their hidden recesses, and explore the chasms and precipices, black torrents and silent forests, that I fancied were concealed there.

CHAPTER XII.

ILL-LUCK.

A CANADIAN came from Fort Laramie, and brought a curious piece of intelligence. A trapper, fresh from the mountains, had become enamoured of a Missouri damsel belonging to a family who with other emigrants had been for some days encamped in the neighborhood of the fort. If bravery be the most potent charm to win the favor of the fair, then no wooer could be more irresistible than a Rocky Mountain trapper. In the present instance, the suit was not urged in vain. The lovers concerted a scheme, which they proceeded to carry into effect with all possible despatch. The emigrant party left the fort, and on the next night but one encamped as usual, and placed a guard. A little after midnight, the enamoured trapper drew near, mounted on a strong horse, and leading another by the bridle. Fastening both animals to a tree, he stealthily moved towards the wagons, as if he were approaching a band of buffalo. Eluding the vigilance of the guard, who were probably half asleep, he met his mistress by appointment at the outskirts of the camp, mounted her on his spare horse, and made off with her through the darkness. The sequel of the adventure did not

reach our ears, and we never learned how the imprudent fair one liked an Indian lodge for a dwelling, and a reckless trapper for a bridegroom.

At length The Whirlwind and his warriors determined to move. They had resolved after all their preparations not to go to the rendezvous at La Bonté's camp, but to pass through the Black Hills and spend a few weeks in hunting the buffalo on the other side, until they had killed enough to furnish them with a stock of provisions and with hides to make their lodges for the next season. This done, they were to send out a small independent war-party against the enemy. Their final determination placed us in some embarrassment. Should we go to La Bonté's camp, it was not impossible that the other villages would prove as vacillating as The Whirlwind's, and that no assembly whatever would take place. Our old companion Reynal had conceived a liking for us, or rather for our biscuit and coffee, and for the occasional small presents which we made him. He was very anxious that we should go with the village which he himself intended to follow. He was certain that no Indians would meet at the rendezvous, and said, moreover, that it would be easy to convey our cart and baggage through the Black Hills. He knew, however, nothing of the matter. Neither he nor any white man with us had ever seen the difficult and obscure defiles through which the Indians intended to make their way. I passed them afterwards, and had much ado to force my distressed

horse along the narrow ravines, and through chasms where daylight could scarcely penetrate. Our cart might as easily have been driven over the summit of Pike's Peak. But of this we were ignorant; and in view of the difficulties and uncertainties of an attempt to visit the rendezvous, we recalled the old proverb, about "A bird in the hand," and decided to follow the village.

Both camps, the Indians' and our own, broke up on the morning of the first of July. I was so weak that the aid of a spoonful of whiskey, swallowed at short intervals, alone enabled me to sit my horse through the short journey of that day. For half a mile before us and half a mile behind, the prairie was covered far and wide with the moving throng of savages. The barren, broken plain stretched away to the right and left, and far in front rose the precipitous ridge of the Black Hills. We pushed forward to the head of the scattered column, passing burdened *traineaux*, heavily laden pack-horses, gaunt old women on foot, gay young squaws on horseback, restless children running among the crowd, old men striding along in their white buffalo-robes, and groups of young warriors mounted on their best horses. Henry Chatillon, looking backward over the distant prairie, exclaimed suddenly that a horseman was approaching, and in truth we could just discern a small black speck slowly moving over the face of a distant swell, like a fly creeping on a wall. It rapidly grew larger as it approached.

"White man, I b'lieve," said Henry; "look how he ride. Indian never ride that way. Yes; he got rifle on the saddle before him."

The horseman disappeared in a hollow of the prairie, but we soon saw him again, and as he came riding at a gallop towards us through the crowd of Indians, his long hair streaming in the wind behind him, we recognized the ruddy face and old buckskin frock of Gingras the trapper. He was just arrived from Fort Laramie, and said he had a message for us. A trader named Bisonette, one of Henry's friends, had lately come from the settlements, and intended to go with a party of men to La Bonté's camp, where, as Gingras assured us, ten or twelve villages of Indians would certainly assemble. Bisonette desired that we would cross over and meet him there, and promised that his men should protect our horses and baggage while we went among the Indians. Shaw and I stopped our horses, held a council, and in an evil hour resolved to go.

For the rest of that day our course and that of the Indians was the same. In less than an hour we came to where the high barren prairie terminated, sinking down abruptly in steep descent; and standing on the verge, we saw below us a great meadow. Laramie Creek bounded it on the left, sweeping along in the shadow of the heights, and passing with its shallow and rapid current just beneath us. We sat on horseback, waiting and looking on, while the whole savage array went pouring by, hurrying down the declivity

and spreading over the meadow below. In a few moments the plain was swarming with the moving multitude, some just visible, like specks in the distance, others still hastening by and fording the stream in bustle and confusion. On the edge of the heights sat a group of the elder warriors, gravely smoking and looking with unmoved faces on the wild and striking spectacle.

Up went the lodges in a circle on the margin of the stream. For the sake of quiet we pitched our tent among some trees half a mile distant. In the afternoon we were in the village. The day was a glorious one, and the whole camp seemed lively and animated in sympathy. Groups of children and young girls were laughing gayly outside the lodges. The shields, the lances, and the bows were removed from the tall tripods on which they usually hung, before the dwellings of their owners. The warriors were mounting their horses, and one by one riding away over the prairie towards the neighboring hills.

Shaw and I sat on the grass near the lodge of Reynal. An old woman, with true Indian hospitality, brought a bowl of boiled venison and placed it before us. We amused ourselves with watching a few young squaws who were playing together and chasing each other in and out of one of the lodges. Suddenly the wild yell of the war-whoop came pealing from the hills. A crowd of horsemen appeared, rushing down their sides, and riding at full speed towards the village, each warrior's long hair flying

behind him in the wind like a ship's streamer. As they approached, the confused throng assumed a regular order, and entering two by two, they circled round the area at full gallop, each warrior singing his war-song as he rode. Some of their dresses were superb. They wore crests of feathers, and close tunics of antelope skins, fringed with the scalp-locks of their enemies; many of their shields, too, fluttered with the war-eagle's feathers. All had bows and arrows at their backs; some carried long lances, and a few were armed with guns. The White Shield, their partisan, rode in gorgeous attire at their head, mounted on a black-and-white horse. Mahto-Tatonka and his brothers took no part in this parade, for they were in mourning for their sister, and were all sitting in their lodges, their bodies bedaubed from head to foot with white clay, and a lock of hair cut from the forehead of each.

The warriors rode three times round the village; and as each noted champion passed, the old women would scream out his name, to honor his bravery, and excite the emulation of the younger warriors. Little urchins, not two years old, followed the war-like pageant with glittering eyes, and gazed with eager admiration at the heroes of their tribe.

The procession rode out of the village as it had entered it, and in half an hour all the warriors had returned again, dropping quietly in, singly or in parties of two or three.

The parade over, we were entertained with an

episode of Indian domestic life. A vicious-looking squaw, beside herself with rage, was berating her spouse, who, with a look of total unconcern, sat cross-legged in the middle of his lodge, smoking his pipe in silence. At length, maddened by his coolness, she made a rush at the lodge, seized the poles which supported it, and tugged at them, one after the other, till she brought down the whole structure, poles, hides, and all, clattering on his head, burying him in the wreck of his habitation. He pushed aside the hides with his hand, and presently his head emerged, like a turtle's from its shell. Still he sat smoking sedately as before, a wicked glitter in his eyes alone betraying the pent-up storm within. The squaw, scolding all the while, proceeded to saddle her horse, bestride him, and canter out of the camp, intending, as it seemed, to return to her father's lodge, wherever that might be. The warrior, who had not deigned even to look at her, now coolly arose, disengaged himself from the ruins, tied a cord of hair by way of bridle round the jaw of his buffalo-horse, broke a stout cudgel, about four feet long, from the butt-end of a lodge-pole, mounted, and galloped majestically over the prairie to discipline his offending helpmeet.

As the sun rose next morning we looked across the meadow, and could see the lodges levelled and the Indians gathering together in preparation to leave the camp. Their course lay to the westward. We turned towards the north with our three men, the four

trappers following us, with the Indian family of Morin. We travelled until night, and encamped among some trees by the side of a little brook, where during the whole of the next day we lay waiting for Bisonette; but no Bisonette appeared. Here two of our trapper friends left us, and set out for the Rocky Mountains. On the second morning, despairing of Bisonette's arrival, we resumed our journey, traversing a forlorn and dreary monotony of sun-scorched plains, where no living thing appeared save here and there an antelope flying before us like the wind. When noon came we saw an unwonted and welcome sight; a fine growth of trees, marking the course of a little stream called Horseshoe Creek. They stood wide asunder, spreading a thick canopy of leaves above a surface of rich, tall grass. The stream ran swiftly, as clear as crystal, through the bosom of the wood, sparkling over its bed of white sand, and darkening again as it entered a deep cavern of foliage. I was thoroughly exhausted, and flung myself on the ground, scarcely able to move.

In the morning, as glorious a sun rose upon us as ever animated that wilderness. We advanced, and soon were surrounded by tall bare hills, overspread from top to bottom with prickly-pears and other cacti, that seemed like clinging reptiles. A plain, flat and hard, with scarcely the vestige of grass, lay before us, and a line of tall misshapen trees bounded the onward view. There was no sight or sound of man or beast, or any living thing, although behind

those trees was the long-looked-for place of rendezvous, where we hoped to have found the Indians congregated by thousands. We looked and listened anxiously. We pushed forward with our best speed, and forced our horses through the trees. There were copses of some extent beyond, with a scanty stream creeping among them; and as we pressed through the yielding branches, deer sprang up to the right and left. At length we caught a glimpse of the prairie beyond, emerged upon it, and saw, not a plain covered with encampments and swarming with life, but a vast unbroken desert stretching away before us league upon league, without bush or tree, or anything that had life. We drew rein and gave to the winds our sentiments concerning the whole aboriginal race of America. Our journey was worse than vain. For myself, I was vexed beyond measure; as I well knew that a slight aggravation of my disorder would render this false step irrevocable, and make it impossible to accomplish effectually the object which had led me an arduous journey of between three and four thousand miles.

And where were the Indians? They were mustered in great numbers at a spot about twenty miles distant, where at that very moment they were dancing their war dances. The scarcity of buffalo in the vicinity of La Bonté's camp, which would render their supply of provisions scanty and precarious, had probably prevented them from assembling there; but of all this we knew nothing until some weeks after.

Shaw lashed his horse and galloped forward. I, though much more vexed than he, was not strong enough to adopt this convenient vent to my feelings; so I followed at a quiet pace. We rode up to a solitary old tree, which seemed the only place fit for encampment. Half its branches were dead, and the rest were so scantily furnished with leaves that they cast but a meagre and wretched shade. We threw down our saddles in the strip of shadow cast by the old twisted trunk, and sat down upon them. In silent indignation we remained smoking for an hour or more, shifting our saddles with the shifting shadow, for the sun was intolerably hot.

CHAPTER XIII.

HUNTING INDIANS.

At last we had reached La Bonté's camp, towards which our eyes had turned so long. Of all weary hours, those that passed between noon and sunset of that day may bear away the palm of exquisite discomfort. I lay under the tree reflecting on what course to pursue, watching the shadows which seemed never to move, and the sun which seemed fixed in the sky, and hoping every moment to see the men and horses of Bisonette emerging from the woods. Shaw and Henry had ridden out on a scouting expedition, and did not return till the sun was setting. There was nothing very cheering in their faces or in the news they brought.

"We have been ten miles from here," said Shaw. "We climbed the highest butte we could find, and could not see a buffalo or an Indian; nothing but prairie for twenty miles around us." Henry's horse was disabled by clambering up and down the sides of ravines, and Shaw's was greatly fatigued.

After supper that evening, as we sat around the fire, I proposed to Shaw to wait one day longer, in hopes of Bisonette's arrival, and if he should not come, to send Deslauriers with the cart and baggage

back to Fort Laramie, while we ourselves followed The Whirlwind's village, and attempted to overtake it as it passed the mountains. Shaw, not having the same motive for hunting Indians that I had, was averse to the plan; I therefore resolved to go alone. This design I adopted very unwillingly, for I knew that in the present state of my health the attempt would be painful and hazardous. I hoped that Bisonette would appear in the course of the following day, and bring us some information by which to direct our course, thus enabling me to accomplish my purpose by means less objectionable.

The rifle of Henry Chatillon was necessary for the subsistence of the party in my absence; so I called Raymond, and ordered him to prepare to set out with me. Raymond rolled his eyes vacantly about, but at length, having succeeded in grappling with the idea, he withdrew to his bed under the cart. He was a heavy-moulded fellow, with a broad face, expressing impenetrable stupidity and entire self-confidence. As for his good qualities, he had a sort of stubborn fidelity, an insensibility to danger, and a kind of instinct or sagacity, which sometimes led him right where better heads than his were at a loss. Besides this, he knew very well how to handle a rifle and picket a horse.

Through the following day the sun glared down upon us with a pitiless, penetrating heat. The distant blue prairie seemed quivering under it. The lodge of our Indian associates parched in the burning

rays, and our rifles, as they leaned against the tree, were too hot for the touch. There was a dead silence through our camp, broken only by the hum of gnats and mosquitoes. The men, resting their foreheads on their arms, were sleeping under the cart. The Indians kept close within their lodge, except the newly-married pair, who were seated together under an awning of buffalo-robes, and the old conjurer, who, with his hard, emaciated face and gaunt ribs, was perched aloft like a turkey-buzzard, among the dead branches of an old tree, constantly on the look-out for enemies. We dined, and then Shaw saddled his horse.

"I will ride back," said he, "to Horseshoe Creek, and see if Bisonette is there."

"I would go with you," I answered, "but I must reserve all the strength I have."

The afternoon dragged away at last. I occupied myself in cleaning my rifle and pistols, and making other preparations for the journey. It was late before I wrapped myself in my blanket, and lay down for the night, with my head on my saddle. Shaw had not returned, but this gave us no uneasiness, for we supposed that he had fallen in with Bisonette, and was spending the night with him. For a day or two past I had gained in strength and health, but about midnight an attack of pain awoke me, and for some hours I could not sleep. The moon was quivering on the broad breast of the Platte; nothing could be heard except those low inexplicable sounds,

like whisperings and footsteps, which no one who has spent the night alone amid deserts and forests will be at a loss to understand. As I was falling asleep, a familiar voice, shouting from the distance, awoke me again. A rapid step approached the camp, and Shaw, on foot, with his gun in his hand, hastily entered.

"Where 's your horse?" said I, raising myself on my elbow.

"Lost!" said Shaw. "Where 's Deslauriers?"

"There," I replied, pointing to a confused mass of blankets and buffalo-robes.

Shaw touched them with the butt of his gun, and up sprang our faithful Canadian.

"Come, Deslauriers; stir up the fire, and get me something to eat."

"Where 's Bisonette?" asked I.

"The Lord knows; there 's nobody at Horseshoe Creek."

Shaw had gone back to the spot where we had encamped two days before, and finding nothing there but the ashes of our fires, he had tied his horse to the tree while he bathed in the stream. Something startled his horse, which broke loose, and for two hours Shaw tried in vain to catch him. Sunset approached, and it was twelve miles to camp. So he abandoned the attempt, and set out on foot to join us. The greater part of his perilous and solitary walk was in darkness. His moccasons were worn to tatters and his feet severely lacerated. He sat down

to eat, however, the usual equanimity of his temper not at all disturbed by his misfortune, and my last recollection before falling asleep was of Shaw, seated cross-legged before the fire, smoking his pipe.

When I awoke again there was a fresh damp smell in the air, a gray twilight involved the prairie, and above its eastern verge was a streak of cold red sky. I called to the men, and in a moment a fire was blazing brightly in the dim morning light, and breakfast was getting ready. We sat down together on the grass, to the last civilized meal which Raymond and I were destined to enjoy for some time.

"Now bring in the horses."

My little mare Pauline was soon standing by the fire. She was a fleet, hardy, and gentle animal, christened after Paul Dorion, from whom I had procured her in exchange for Pontiac. She did not look as if equipped for a morning pleasure-ride. In front of the black, high-bowed mountain-saddle were fastened holsters, with heavy pistols. A pair of saddle-bags, a blanket tightly rolled, a small parcel of Indian presents tied up in a buffalo-skin, a leather bag of flour, and a smaller one of tea, were all secured behind, and a long trail-rope was wound round her neck. Raymond had a strong black mule, equipped in a similar manner. We crammed our powder-horns to the throat, and mounted.

"I will meet you at Fort Laramie on the first of August," said I to Shaw.

"That is," he replied, "if we don't meet before

that. I think I shall follow after you in a day or two."

This in fact he attempted, and would have succeeded if he had not encountered obstacles against which his resolute spirit was of no avail. Two days after I left him he sent Deslauriers to the fort with the cart and baggage, and set out for the mountains with Henry Chatillon; but a tremendous thunder-storm had deluged the prairie, and nearly obliterated not only our trail but that of the Indians themselves. They encamped at the base of the mountains, at a loss in what direction to go. In the morning Shaw found himself poisoned by the plant known as "poison ivy," in such a manner that it was impossible for him to travel. So they turned back reluctantly towards Fort Laramie. Shaw lay seriously ill for a week, and remained at the fort till I rejoined him some time after.

To return to my own story. Raymond and I shook hands with our friends, rode out upon the prairie, and, clambering the sandy hollows channelled in the sides of the hills, gained the high plains above. If a curse had been pronounced upon the land, it could not have worn an aspect more forlorn. There were abrupt broken hills, deep hollows, and wide plains; but all alike glared with an insupportable whiteness under the burning sun. The country, as if parched by the heat, was cracked into innumerable fissures and ravines, that not a little impeded our progress. Their steep sides were white and raw, and along the

bottom we several times discovered the broad tracks of the grizzly bear, nowhere more abundant than in this region. The ridges of the hills were hard as rock, and strewn with pebbles of flint and coarse red jasper; looking from them, there was nothing to relieve the desert uniformity, save here and there a pine-tree clinging at the edge of a ravine, and stretching its rough, shaggy arms into the scorching air. Its resinous odors recalled the pine-clad mountains of New England, and, goaded as I was with a morbid thirst, I thought with a longing desire on the crystal treasure poured in such wasteful profusion from our thousand hills. I heard, in fancy, the plunging and gurgling of waters among the shaded rocks, and saw them gleaming dark and still far down amid the crevices, the cold drops trickling from the long green mosses.

When noon came we found a little stream, with a few trees and bushes; and here we rested for an hour. Then we travelled on, guided by the sun, until, just before sunset, we reached another stream, called Bitter Cotton-wood Creek. A thick growth of bushes and old storm-beaten trees grew at intervals along its bank. Near the foot of one of the trees we flung down our saddles, and hobbling our horses, turned them loose to feed. The little stream was clear and swift, and ran musically over its white sands. Small water-birds were splashing in the shallows, and filling the air with cries and flutterings. The sun was just sinking among gold and

crimson clouds behind Mount Laramie. I lay upon a log by the margin of the water, and watched the restless motions of the little fish in a deep, still nook below. Strange to say, I seemed to have gained strength since the morning, and almost felt a sense of returning health.

We built our fire. Night came, and the wolves began to howl. One deep voice began, answered in awful responses from hills, plains, and woods. Such sounds do not disturb one's sleep upon the prairie. We picketed the mare and the mule, and did not awake until daylight. Then we turned them loose, still hobbled, to feed for an hour before starting. We were getting ready our breakfast when Raymond saw an antelope half a mile distant and said he would go and shoot it.

"Your business," said I, "is to look after the animals. I am too weak to do much, if anything happens to them, and you must keep within sight of the camp."

Raymond promised, and set out with his rifle in his hand. The mare and the mule had crossed the stream, and were feeding among the long grass on the other side, much tormented by the attacks of large green-headed flies. As I watched them, I saw them go down into a hollow, and as several minutes elapsed without their reappearing, I waded through the stream to look after them. To my vexation and alarm I discovered them at a great distance, galloping away at full speed, Pauline in advance, with her

hobbles broken, and the mule, still fettered, following with awkward leaps. I fired my rifle and shouted to recall Raymond. In a moment he came running through the stream, with a red handkerchief bound round his head. I pointed to the fugitives, and ordered him to pursue them. Muttering a "Sacré" between his teeth, he set out at full speed, still swinging his rifle in his hand. I walked up to the top of a hill, and, looking away over the prairie, could distinguish the runaways, still at full gallop. Returning to the fire, I sat down at the foot of a tree. Wearily and anxiously hour after hour passed away. The loose bark dangling from the trunk behind me flapped to and fro in the wind, and the mosquitoes kept up their drowsy hum; but other than this there was no sight nor sound of life throughout the burning landscape. The sun rose higher and higher, until I knew that it must be noon. It seemed scarcely possible that the animals could be recovered. If they were not, my situation was one of serious difficulty. Shaw, when I left him, had decided to move that morning, but whither he had not determined. To look for him would be a vain attempt. Fort Laramie was forty miles distant, and I could not walk a mile without great effort. Not then having learned the philosophy of yielding to disproportionate obstacles, I resolved, come what would, to continue the pursuit of the Indians. Only one plan occurred to me; this was, to send Raymond to the fort with an order for more horses, while I remained on the

spot, awaiting his return, which might take place within three days. But to remain stationary and alone for three days, in a country full of dangerous Indians, was not the most flattering of prospects; and, protracted as my Indian hunt must be by such delay, it was not easy to foretell its result. Revolving these matters, I grew hungry; and as our stock of provisions, except four or five pounds of flour, was by this time exhausted, I left the camp to see what game I could find. Nothing could be seen except four or five large curlews wheeling over my head, and now and then alighting upon the prairie. I shot two of them, and was about returning, when a startling sight caught my eye. A small, dark object, like a human head, suddenly appeared, and vanished among the thick bushes along the stream below. In that country every stranger is a suspected enemy; and I threw forward the muzzle of my rifle. In a moment the bushes were violently shaken, two heads, but not human heads, protruded, and to my great joy I recognized the downcast, disconsolate countenance of the black mule and the yellow visage of Pauline. Raymond came upon the mule, pale and haggard, complaining of a fiery pain in his chest. I took charge of the animals while he kneeled down by the side of the stream to drink. He had kept the runaways in sight as far as the Side Fork of Laramie Creek, a distance of more than ten miles; and here with great difficulty he had succeeded in catching them. I saw that he was unarmed, and asked him

what he had done with his rifle. It had encumbered him in his pursuit, and he had dropped it on the prairie, thinking that he could find it on his return; but in this he had failed. The loss might prove a very serious one. I was too much rejoiced, however, at the recovery of the animals, and at the fidelity of Raymond, who might easily have deserted with them, to think much about it; and having made some tea for him in a tin vessel which we had brought with us, I told him that I would give him two hours for resting before we set out again. He had eaten nothing that day; but having no appetite, he lay down immediately to sleep. I picketed the animals among the best grass that I could find, and made fires of green wood to protect them from the flies; then sitting down again by the tree, I watched the slow movements of the sun, grudging every moment that passed.

The time I had mentioned expired, and I awoke Raymond. We saddled and set out again, but first we went in search of the lost rifle, and in the course of an hour were fortunate enough to find it. Then we turned westward, and moved over the hills and hollows at a slow pace towards the Black Hills. The heat no longer tormented us, for a cloud was before the sun. The air grew fresh and cool, the distant mountains frowned more gloomily, there was a low muttering of thunder, and dense black masses of cloud rose heavily behind the broken peaks. At first they were fringed with silver by the afternoon sun;

but soon thick blackness overspread the sky, and the desert around us was wrapped in gloom. There was an awful sublimity in the hoarse murmuring of the thunder, and the sombre shadows that involved the mountains and the plain. The storm broke with a zigzag blinding flash, a terrific crash of thunder, and a hurricane that howled over the prairie, dashing floods of water against us. Raymond looked about him and cursed the merciless elements. There seemed no shelter near, but we discerned at length a deep ravine gashed in the level prairie, and saw half-way down its side an old pine-tree, whose rough horizontal boughs formed a sort of pent-house against the tempest. We found a practicable passage, led our animals down, and fastened them to large loose stones at the bottom; then climbing up, we drew our blankets over our heads, and crouched close beneath the old tree. Perhaps I was no competent judge of time, but it seemed to me that we were sitting there a full hour, while around us poured a deluge of rain, through which the rocks on the opposite side of the gulf were barely visible. The first burst of the tempest soon subsided, but the rain poured in steady torrents. At length Raymond grew impatient, and scrambling out of the ravine, gained the level prairie above.

"What does the weather look like?" asked I, from my seat under the tree.

"It looks bad," he answered: "dark all round;" and again he descended and sat down by my side. Some ten minutes elapsed.

"Go up again," said I, "and take another look;" and he clambered up the precipice. "Well, how is it?"

"Just the same, only I see one little bright spot over the top of the mountain."

The rain by this time had begun to abate; and going down to the bottom of the ravine, we loosened the animals, who were standing up to their knees in water. Leading them up the rocky throat of the ravine, we reached the plain above. All around us was obscurity; but the bright spot above the mountains grew wider and ruddier, until at length the clouds drew apart, and a flood of sunbeams poured down, streaming along the precipices, and involving them in a thin blue haze, as soft as that which wraps the Apennines on an evening in spring. Rapidly the clouds were broken and scattered, like routed legions of evil spirits. The plain lay basking in sunbeams around us; a rainbow arched the desert from north to south, and far in front a line of woods seemed inviting us to refreshment and repose. When we reached them, they were glistening with prismatic dewdrops, and enlivened by the songs and flutterings of birds. Strange winged insects, benumbed by the rain, were clinging to the leaves and the bark of the trees.

Raymond kindled a fire with great difficulty. The animals turned eagerly to feed on the soft rich grass, while I, wrapping myself in my blanket, lay down and gazed on the evening landscape. The moun-

tains, whose stern features had frowned upon us so gloomily, seemed lighted up with a benignant smile, and the green waving undulations of the plain were gladdened with warm sunshine. Wet, ill, and wearied as I was, my heart grew lighter at the view, and I drew from it an augury of good.

When morning came, Raymond awoke, coughing violently, though I had apparently received no injury. We mounted, crossed the little stream, pushed through the trees, and began our journey over the plain beyond. And now, as we rode slowly along, we looked anxiously on every hand for traces of the Indians, not doubting that the village had passed somewhere in that vicinity; but the scanty shrivelled grass was not more than three or four inches high, and the ground was so hard that a host might have marched over it and left scarcely a trace of its passage. Up hill and down hill, and clambering through ravines, we continued our journey. As we were passing the foot of a hill, I saw Raymond, who was some rods in advance, suddenly jerk the reins of his mule, slide from his seat, and run in a crouching posture up a hollow; then in an instant I heard the sharp crack of his rifle. A wounded antelope came running on three legs over the hill. I lashed Pauline and made after him. My fleet little mare soon brought me by his side, and, after leaping and bounding for a few moments in vain, he stood still, as if despairing of escape. His glistening eyes turned up towards my face with so piteous a look that it was

with feelings of infinite compunction that I shot him through the head with a pistol. Raymond skinned and cut him up, and we hung the fore-quarters to our saddles, much rejoiced that our exhausted stock of provisions was renewed in such good time.

Gaining the top of a hill, we could see along the cloudy verge of the prairie before us the lines of trees and shadowy groves, that marked the course of Laramie Creek. Before noon we reached its banks, and began anxiously to search them for footprints of the Indians. We followed the stream for several miles, now on the shore and now wading in the water, scrutinizing every sand-bar and every muddy bank. So long was the search that we began to fear that we had left the trail undiscovered behind us. At length I heard Raymond shouting, and saw him jump from his mule to examine some object under the shelving bank. I rode up to his side. It was the impression of an Indian moccason. Encouraged by this, we continued our search till at last some appearances on a soft surface of earth not far from the shore attracted my eye; and going to examine them, I found half a dozen tracks, some made by men and some by children. Just then Raymond observed across the stream the mouth of a brook, entering it from the south. He forded the water, rode in at the opening, and in a moment I heard him shouting again; so I passed over and joined him. The brook had a broad sandy bed, along which the water trickled in a scanty stream; and on either bank

the bushes were so close that the view was completely intercepted. I found Raymond stooping over the footprints of three or four horses. Proceeding, we found those of a man, then those of a child, then those of more horses; till at last the bushes on each bank were beaten down and broken, and the sand ploughed up with a multitude of footsteps, and scored across with the furrows made by the lodge-poles that had been dragged through. It was now certain that we had found the trail. I pushed through the bushes, and at a little distance on the prairie beyond found the ashes of a hundred and fifty lodge-fires, with bones and pieces of buffalo-robes scattered about, and the pickets to which horses had been tied, still standing in the ground. Elated by our success, we selected a convenient tree, and, turning the animals loose, prepared to make a meal from the haunch of the antelope.

Hardship and exposure had thriven with me wonderfully. I had gained both health and strength since leaving La Bonté's camp. Raymond and I dined together, in high spirits; for we rashly presumed that having found one end of the trail we should have little difficulty in reaching the other. But when the animals were led in, we found that our ill-luck had not ceased to follow us. As I was saddling Pauline, I saw that her eye was dull as lead, and the hue of her yellow coat visibly darkened. I placed my foot in the stirrup to mount, when she staggered and fell flat on her side. Gaining her feet

with an effort, she stood by the fire with a drooping head. Whether she had been bitten by a snake, or poisoned by some noxious plant, or attacked by a sudden disorder, it was hard to say; but at all events, her sickness was sufficiently ill-timed and unfortunate. I succeeded in a second attempt to mount her, and with a slow pace we moved forward on the trail of the Indians. It led us up a hill and over a dreary plain; and here, to our great mortification, the traces almost disappeared, for the ground was hard as adamant; and if its flinty surface had ever retained the dent of a hoof, the marks had been washed away by the deluge of yesterday. An Indian village, in its disorderly march, is scattered over the prairie often to the width of half a mile; so that its trail is nowhere clearly marked, and the task of following it is made doubly wearisome and difficult. By good fortune, many large ant-hills, a yard or more in diameter, were scattered over the plain, and these were frequently broken by the footprints of men and horses, and marked by traces of the lodge-poles. The succulent leaves of the prickly-pear, bruised from the same causes, also helped to guide us; so, inch by inch, we moved along. Often we lost the trail altogether, and then found it again; but late in the afternoon we were totally at fault. We stood alone, without a clew to guide us. The broken plain expanded for league after league around us, and in front the long dark ridge of mountains stretched from north to south. Mount Laramie, a little on our

right, towered high above the rest, and from a dark valley just beyond one of its lower declivities, we discerned volumes of white smoke rising slowly.

"I think," said Raymond, "some Indians must be there. Perhaps we had better go." But this plan was not lightly to be adopted, and we determined still to continue our search after the lost trail. Our good stars prompted us to this decision, for we afterward had reason to believe, from information given us by the Indians, that the smoke was raised as a decoy by a Crow war-party.

Evening was coming on, and there was no wood or water nearer than the foot of the mountains. So thither we turned, directing our course towards the point where Laramie Creek issues upon the prairie. When we reached it, the bare tops of the mountains were still bright with sunshine. The little river was breaking, with an angry current, from its dark prison. There was something in the close vicinity of the mountains and the loud surging of the rapids, wonderfully cheering and exhilarating. There was a grass-plot by the river-bank, surrounded by low ridges, which would effectually screen us and our fire from the sight of wandering Indians. Here, among the grass, I observed numerous circles of large stones, traces of a Dahcotah winter encampment. We lay down, and did not awake till the sun was up. A large rock projected from the shore, and behind it the deep water was slowly eddying round and round. The temptation was irresistible. I threw off my

clothes, leaped in, suffered myself to be borne once round with the current, and then, seizing the strong root of a water-plant, drew myself to the shore. The effect was so refreshing that I mistook it for returning health. But scarcely were we mounted and on our way, before the momentary glow passed. Again I hung as usual in my seat, scarcely able to hold myself erect.

"Look yonder," said Raymond; "you see that big hollow there; the Indians must have gone that way, if they went anywhere about here."

We reached the gap, which was like a deep notch cut into the mountain-ridge, and here we soon found an ant-hill furrowed with the mark of a lodge-pole. This was quite enough; there could be no doubt now. As we rode on, the opening growing narrower, the Indians had been compelled to march in closer order, and the traces became numerous and distinct. The gap terminated in a rocky gateway, leading into a rough and steep defile, between two precipitous mountains. Here grass and weeds were bruised to fragments by the throng that had passed through. We moved slowly over the rocks, up the passage; and in this toilsome manner advanced for an hour or two, bare precipices, hundreds of feet high, shooting up on either hand. Raymond, with his hardy mule, was a few rods before me, when we came to the foot of an ascent steeper than the rest, and which I trusted might prove the highest point of the defile. Pauline strained upward for a few yards, moaning and stum-

bling, and then came to a dead stop, unable to proceed further. I dismounted, and attempted to lead her; but my own exhausted strength soon gave out; so I loosened the trail-rope from her neck, and tying it round my arm, crawled up on my hands and knees. I gained the top, totally spent, the sweat-drops trickling from my forehead. Pauline stood like a statue by my side, her shadow falling upon the scorching rock; and in this shade, for there was no other, I lay for some time, scarcely able to move a limb. All around, the black crags, sharp as needles at the top, stood baking in the sun, without tree or bush or blade of grass to cover their nakedness. The whole scene seemed parched with a pitiless, insufferable heat.

After a while I could mount again, and we moved on, descending the defile on its western side. There was something ridiculous in the situation. Man and horse were helpless alike. Pauline and I could neither fight nor run.

Raymond's saddle-girth slipped; and while I proceeded he stopped to repair the mischief. I came to the top of a little declivity, where a welcome sight greeted my eye; a nook of fresh green grass nestled among the cliffs, sunny clumps of bushes on one side, and shaggy old pine-trees leaning from the rocks on the other. A shrill, familiar voice saluted me, and recalled me to days of boyhood; that of the insect called the "locust" by New England schoolboys, which was clinging among the heated boughs of the old pine-trees. Then, too, as I passed the

bushes, the low sound of falling water reached my ear. Pauline turned of her own accord, and pushing through the boughs, we found a black rock, overarched by the cool green canopy. An icy stream was pouring from its side into a wide basin of white sand, whence it had no visible outlet, but filtered through into the soil below. While I filled a tin cup at the spring, Pauline was eagerly plunging her head deep in the pool. Other visitors had been there before us. All around in the soft soil were the footprints of elk, deer, and the Rocky-Mountain sheep; and the grizzly bear too had left the recent prints of his broad foot, with its frightful array of claws. Among these mountains was his home.

Soon after leaving the spring we found a little grassy plain, encircled by the mountains, and marked, to our great joy, with all the traces of an Indian camp. Raymond's practised eye detected certain signs, by which he recognized the spot where Reynal's lodge had been pitched and his horses picketed. I approached, and stood looking at the place. Reynal and I had, I believe, hardly a feeling in common, and it perplexed me a good deal to understand why I should look with so much interest on the ashes of his fire, when between him and me there was no other bond of sympathy than the slender and precarious one of a kindred race.

In half an hour from this we were free of the mountains. There was a plain before us, totally barren and thickly peopled in many parts with prairie-

dogs, who sat at the mouths of their burrows, and yelped at us as we passed. The plain, as we thought, was about six miles wide; but it cost us two hours to cross it. Then another mountain-range rose before us. From the dense bushes that clothed the steep for a thousand feet shot up black crags, all leaning one way, and shattered by storms and thunder into grim and threatening shapes. As we entered a narrow passage on the trail of the Indians, they impended frightfully above our heads.

Our course was through thick woods, in the shade and sunlight of overhanging boughs. As we wound from side to side of the passage, to avoid its obstructions, we could see at intervals, through the foliage, the awful forms of the gigantic cliffs, that seemed to hem us in on the right and on the left, before and behind.

In an open space, fenced in by high rocks, stood two Indian forts, of a square form, rudely built of sticks and logs. They were somewhat ruinous, having probably been constructed the year before. Each might have contained about twenty men. Perhaps in this gloomy spot some party had been beset by enemies, and those scowling rocks and blasted trees might not long since have looked down on a conflict, unchronicled and unknown. Yet if any traces of bloodshed remained they were hidden by the bushes and tall rank weeds.

Gradually the mountains drew apart, and the passage expanded into a plain, where again we found traces of an Indian encampment. There were trees

and bushes just before us, and we stopped here for an hour's rest and refreshment. When we had finished our meal, Raymond struck fire, and, lighting his pipe, sat down at the foot of a tree to smoke. For some time I observed him puffing away with a face of unusual solemnity. Then slowly taking the pipe from his lips, he looked up and remarked that we had better not go any farther.

"Why not?" asked I.

He said that the country was become very dangerous, that we were entering the range of the Snakes, Arapahoes, and Gros-Ventre Blackfeet, and that if any of their wandering parties should meet us, it would cost us our lives; but he added with blunt fidelity that he would go anywhere I wished. I told him to bring up the animals, and mounting them we proceeded again. I confess that, as we moved forward, the prospect seemed but a doubtful one. I would have given the world for my ordinary elasticity of body and mind, and for a horse of such strength and spirit as the journey required.

Closer and closer the rocks gathered round us, growing taller and steeper, and pressing more and more upon our path. We entered at length a defile which, in its way, I never have seen rivalled. The mountain was cracked from top to bottom, and we were creeping along the bottom of the fissure, in dampness and gloom, with the clink of hoofs on the loose shingly rocks, and the hoarse murmuring of a petulant brook which kept us company. Sometimes

the water, foaming among the stones, overspread the whole narrow passage; sometimes, withdrawing to one side, it gave us room to pass dry-shod. Looking up, we could see a narrow ribbon of bright blue sky between the dark edges of the opposing cliffs. This did not last long. The passage soon widened, and sunbeams found their way down, flashing upon the black waters. The defile would spread to many rods in width; bushes, trees, and flowers would spring by the side of the brook; the cliffs would be feathered with shrubbery, that clung in every crevice, and fringed with trees, that grew along their sunny edges. Then we would be moving again in darkness. The passage seemed about four miles long, and before we reached the end of it, the unshod hoofs of our animals were broken, and their legs cut by the sharp stones. Issuing from the mountain we found another plain. All around it stood a circle of precipices, that seemed the impersonation of Silence and Solitude. Here again the Indians had encamped, as well they might, after passing with their women, children, and horses, through the gulf behind us. In one day we had made a journey which it had cost them three to accomplish.

The only outlet to this amphitheatre lay over a hill some two hundred feet high, up which we moved with difficulty. Looking from the top, we saw that at last we were free of the mountains. The prairie spread before us, but so wild and broken that the view was everywhere obstructed. Far on our left one tall hill swelled up against the sky, on the

smooth, pale-green surface of which four slowly moving black specks were discernible. They were evidently buffalo, and we hailed the sight as a good augury; for where the buffalo were, there the Indians would probably be found. We hoped on that very night to reach the village. We were anxious to do so for a double reason, wishing to bring our journey to an end, and knowing moreover that though to enter the village in broad daylight would be perfectly safe, yet to encamp in its vicinity would be dangerous. But as we rode on, the sun was sinking, and soon was within half an hour of the horizon. We ascended a hill, and looked about us for a spot for our encampment. The prairie was like a turbulent ocean, suddenly congealed when its waves were at the highest, and it lay half in light and half in shadow, as the rich sunshine, yellow as gold, was pouring over it. The rough bushes of the wild sage were growing everywhere, its dull pale-green overspreading hill and hollow. Yet a little way before us, a bright verdant line of grass was winding along the plain, and here and there throughout its course glistened pools of water. We went down to it, kindled a fire, and turned our horses loose to feed. It was a little trickling brook, that for some yards on either side turned the barren prairie into fertility, and here and there it spread into deep pools, where the beavers had dammed it up.

We placed our last remaining piece of antelope before a scanty fire, mournfully reflecting on our

exhausted stock of provisions. Just then a large gray hare, peculiar to these prairies, came jumping along, and seated himself within fifty yards to look at us. I thoughtlessly raised my rifle to shoot him, but Raymond called out to me not to fire for fear the report should reach the ears of the Indians. That night for the first time we considered that the danger to which we were exposed was of a somewhat serious character; and to those who are unacquainted with Indians, it may seem strange that our chief apprehensions arose from the supposed proximity of the people whom we intended to visit. Had any straggling party of these faithful friends caught sight of us from the hill-top, they would probably have returned in the night to plunder us of our horses, and perhaps of our scalps. But the prairie is unfavorable to nervousness; and I presume that neither Raymond nor I thought twice of the matter that evening.

For eight hours pillowed on our saddles, we lay insensible as logs. Pauline's yellow head was stretched over me when I awoke. I rose and examined her. Her feet were bruised and swollen by the accidents of yesterday, but her eye was brighter, her motions livelier, and her mysterious malady had visibly abated. We moved on, hoping within an hour to come in sight of the Indian village; but again disappointment awaited us. The trail disappeared upon a hard and stony plain. Raymond and I rode from side to side, scrutinizing every yard of ground, until at length I found traces of the lodge-poles, by the

side of a ridge of rocks. We began again to follow them.

"What is that black spot out there on the prairie?"

"It looks like a dead buffalo," answered Raymond.

We rode to it, and found it to be the huge carcass of a bull killed by the hunters as they had passed. Tangled hair and scraps of hide were scattered on all sides, for the wolves had made merry over it, and hollowed out the entire carcass. It was covered with myriads of large black crickets, and from its appearance must have lain there four or five days. The sight was a disheartening one, and I observed to Raymond that the Indians might still be fifty or sixty miles off. But he shook his head, and replied that they dared not go so far for fear of their enemies, the Snakes.

Soon after this we lost the trail again, and ascended a neighboring ridge, totally at a loss. Before us lay a plain perfectly flat, spreading on the right and left, without apparent limit, and bounded in front by a long broken line of hills, ten or twelve miles distant. All was open and exposed to view, yet not a buffalo nor an Indian was visible.

"Do you see that?" said Raymond: "now we had better turn round."

But as Raymond's *bourgeois* thought otherwise, we descended the hill and began to cross the plain. We had come so far that neither Pauline's limbs nor my own could carry me back to Fort Laramie. I considered that the lines of expediency and inclination tallied exactly, and that the most prudent course was

to keep forward. The ground immediately around us was thickly strewn with the skulls and bones of buffalo, for here a year or two before the Indians had made a "surround;" yet no living game was in sight. At length an antelope sprang up and gazed at us. We fired together, and both missed, although the animal stood, a fair mark, within eighty yards. This ill-success might perhaps be charged to our own eagerness, for by this time we had no provisions left except a little flour. We could see several pools of water, glistening in the distance. As we approached, wolves and antelopes bounded away through the tall grass around them, and flocks of large white plover flew screaming over their surface. Having failed of the antelope, Raymond tried his hand at the birds, with the same ill-success. The water also disappointed us. Its margin was so mired by the crowd of buffalo that our timorous animals were afraid to approach. So we turned away and moved towards the hills. The rank grass, where it was not trampled down by the buffalo, fairly swept our horses' necks.

Again we found the same execrable barren prairie offering no clew by which to guide our way. As we drew near the hills, an opening appeared, through which the Indians must have gone if they had passed that way at all. Slowly we began to ascend it. I felt the most dreary forebodings of ill-success, when on looking round I could discover neither dent of hoof, nor footprint, nor trace of lodge-pole, though the passage was encumbered by the skulls of buffalo.

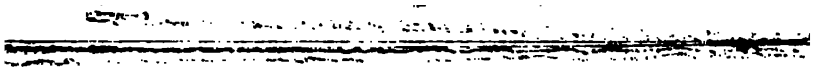
We heard thunder muttering; another storm was coming on.

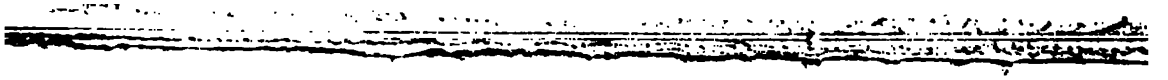
As we gained the top of the gap, the prospect beyond began to disclose itself. First, we saw a long dark line of ragged clouds upon the horizon, while above them rose the peaks of the Medicine Bow range, the vanguard of the Rocky Mountains; then little by little the plain came into view, a vast green uniformity, forlorn and tenantless, though Laramie Creek glistened in a waving line over its surface, without a bush or a tree upon its banks. As yet, the round projecting shoulder of a hill intercepted a part of the view. I rode in advance, when suddenly I could distinguish a few dark spots on the prairie, along the bank of the stream.

"Buffalo!" said I.

"Horses, by God!" exclaimed Raymond, lashing his mule forward as he spoke. More and more of the plain disclosed itself, and more and more horses appeared, scattered along the river-bank, or feeding in bands over the prairie. Then, standing in a circle by the stream, swarming with their savage inhabitants, we saw, a mile or more off, the tall lodges of the Ogillallah. Never did the heart of wanderer more gladden at the sight of home than did mine at the sight of that Indian camp.

END OF VOL. I.





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